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TWICE THE CLOCK ROUND

by the same author

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THE HEALING KNIFE
A SURGEON'S DESTINY
BEAUTY FROM THE SURGEON'S KNIFE
A RING AT THE DOOR
DONKEY SERENADE

TWICE THE CLOCK ROUND

One Day of a Surgeon's Life

B502

by

GEORGE SAVA

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FABER AND FABER LIMITED
24 Russell Square
London

First published in October Mcmxl
by Faber and Faber Limited
24 Russell Square, London, W.C.1
Second impression September Mcmxli
Printed in Great Britain by
Western Printing Services Ltd., Bristol
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To

JANNETTE

the inspiration
of my life

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PROLOGUE

*

When the Great War broke out I was the third son of a wealthy and respected family, destined for an envied naval career. . . . It was with these words that I began unfolding the story of my life, a life, I thought, that had found its true significance and had fulfilled, at least in part, its true mission.

The horrors of my last battle, a death struggle between a new order and an old, with myself inadvertently finding myself on the side of the old, brought the sudden realization of my true vocation. The bitterness, the inhumanity and sadness, first of war and then of revolution, seared into my mind the rightness and honour of earning one's own bread by the sweat of one's own brow, and not by that sweat, effort, and tragedy by which my forefathers had earned theirs—that is, the sweat of their peasants and bailiffs. *Requiescant in pace.* They had their day. Mine was to be very different.

PROLOGUE

I ended the narrative of my struggles and adventures with the conclusion that nothing fails like success, nor succeeds like failure. This was something more than just a fine phrase; it was a motto. I shall never bother to translate it into Latin and put it on a shield, but it has always been firmly fixed before my eyes.

Twenty years ago, in a moment of exaltation, amidst scenes of carnage and disaster, I picked up the healing knife in an attempt to save the life of a friend stricken by a bullet. Either to save him from death or from suffering in life. That was twenty years ago. A long time ago, nearly a generation, but I remember that day as few days in my life, for it was on that day, as the shadows deepened on a lost battlefield, that the cries of the wounded, friend and foe alike, woke in me a fierce determination to offer up my life and skill in the mission of the healing knife. Let me cut deep into the body of man and cut away Pain, I prayed. And a part of that prayer was answered.

I was no arbiter of the fate of nations. I did not sit at the table in the Versailles Palace and sign a document which has come to be regarded as the most fateful and foolish in human history. When I lifted my head from my studies I said, 'War must not, cannot, come again.' I took courage from the dead; from the four years of misery and catastrophe. I was no Jeremiah. I was young and full of the hope and the confidence of youth. I saw weary and broken

men return to the arts of peace, to study and to contemplation, each according to inclinations seeking an outlet for his knowledge, for his craft or his physical powers.

Never again, they said, and I with them, never again will there be war. Otherwise why return to the fields, to the factories, to the laboratories, to driving buses, running sweetshops and florists', studying languages, poetry, art, philosophy—why all these things if there is to be war again. More war and yet more and for ever and for ever. Why not call peace an armistice and be done with it, and why not go to bed with a revolver and a knapsack and a gasmask. But I laughed at the idea of war. Had I not laughed I should probably have gone mad. I should certainly have seen little in the mission I have spoken of—the mission of the healing knife. It would have required more resignation and philosophy than I had to persuade me that the human race was worth healing if it was only to wander back into its shambles once it had recovered from its wounds.

And yet we have gone back to war; limped back. There is no shouting, no flag waving, no demonstrations, no hate, not even tears. Even the old songs like 'Tipperary' and 'Pack up your Troubles' sound false, ghost melodies that linger with the dead in Flanders. The tall obelisk of a cenotaph reminds us of a war that was to end war. We are solemn this time. We are determined. We fought for liberty last time and against tyranny, but in the two decades inter-

vening we have done precious little to keep that liberty and freedom which we love in the hearts and minds of others. But I am not a politician and I cannot think as politicians do. They seem destined to inherit the earth and I am only astonished that we can be so gullible and so simple as to believe what they say and do. With a knowledge of the futility in what I say, I still say it. It is time that we ordinary men, we doctors, surgeons, barristers, grocers and candle-stick makers of all nations and climes abolished war and those that bring war. Presto!

But as far as this war and the last is concerned, we know that our national conscience is clear. We, of all nations, have desired peace ardently and have sacrificed greatly for it—to a point where our national honour and ego was flouted and yet we still strove for peace. So much honour to us, then.

Such were my thoughts then, one morning as I was preparing to start my day's work. I imagined, and with no little bitterness, the small sharp lancet that I was going to hold in performing an operation. It glittered. It grew to the size of a bayonet. Was not its proper place on the end of a rifle? The healing knife on the end of a rifle prodding into the terror-stricken body of an enemy whose life I might at the next moment be asked to save if he fell a prisoner of war!

The glitter went and the lancet was in my hand. I was assisting a birth by a Caesarian operation.

Life out of death. Where does life begin? Where

does it end? It begins in the small deep womb, protected, warmed by a mother's blood, cherished and expected, and then . . . ? Then five years of babyhood, an education, care and trouble over childhood's ills, mumps, certainly measles, expensive medicines if ailing, exercise, father's love, mother's love, growing to adolescence, a love-affair, a man in uniform meeting the healing knife on the end of a rifle, stabbed, wounded nearly to death, saved, returned to the trenches, and so on and so on.

My thoughts are gruesome. As a surgeon you have no right to have gruesome thoughts, someone says. Perhaps you ought not to have thoughts. You're only a carpenter, an engineer, a man that mends and repairs things. Your job is to stand with an oil-can in your hand and keep the wheels turning. Yours not to reason why. War needs men. War kills men or wounds them. You can't do anything about the killed, no matter how clever you are. And you are clever. Awfully clever. You know all the tricks. (You ought to after twenty years.) You know this and that. You've taken out two thousand and fifty-five appendices, millions of cysts, billions, trillions, quadrillions are the germs you've killed, microbes you've defeated. You've done all this. You're awfully clever, but you can't bring the dead to life. You aren't meant to. Nobody blames you. Nobody ever blames a doctor. They wouldn't know how to with all those difficult terms and symbols. And if they don't blame you and let you kill or save, what are you grumbling

about? It isn't your life, is it? You get paid for it, don't you? It's a job of work same as anything else. So shut up.

So I shan't judge. I shan't mind my ideals being shattered in the first puff of smoke. I shall only say that ideals cannot be shattered. They aren't real and you can't shatter something that hasn't substance. In the same way, you can't dissect a soul. So I'll leave my ideals on the shelf and take them out to be dusted when I remember, because it is war and nothing I can do will stop it, nothing that I say. There is only one thing left and that is the best thing. To use the healing knife no matter why or how. That at least shall always save life. And I shall remain true to its mission best by serving the cause of my adopted country with all my body and soul. Wheresoever thou goest . . . and . . . thy enemies shall be my enemies and thy gods my gods.

For some reason unknown to me and probably totally irrational, I wish to place on record, not the history of a lifetime (I have done that already) nor adventures of a bold and heroic kind; I want to chronicle simply and truthfully an odd twenty-four hours taken at random from my life as a surgeon. There is nothing startling or extraordinary about them. They are much like hundreds of other hours I have spent, and probably resemble the many hours to come. I am cheerfully wrenching them out of context with no unnecessary explanations. They are contemporary. They seem to be crowded with many

ordinary everyday things. They are not heavily jewelled with memories. Most of them will be written and quickly forgotten. Perhaps a man a thousand years hence will pick the book up and learn something of our contemporary life. If that is so, I trust he finds it amusing and never dull. But if it chance into the hands of contemporary readers, may they judge the book in conjunction with their own experiences. It may be found that we have much in common; much to relate; much to be sad about and much to laugh over. In any case, time does not wait and it is much later than we think. . . .

I

NINE O'CLOCK: MORNING

*

Time: nine o'clock in the morning. Stage: my flat.

My day begins at nine; that is, after I have finished swallowing two cups of tea, eating three small slices of toast with honey. A pleasurable routine this, after a night's sound sleep. No phone tinkled to disturb me; no baby was in a hurry to be born; and no-one was unlucky enough to find himself under a bus. This being so, I felt everything was fine.

Nobody will care to know that I still prefer a Continental breakfast to one of bacon and eggs. But there it is. I do. More nourishment than buttered toast and honey would stir my Russian blood to frenzy perhaps. The bear must not be fed too much, otherwise he grows too strong and finds a small flat not big enough to do exercises in without first taking off the roof.

Left foot, right foot, knees bend and—hallo! there's

a ring at the door. Exercises are abandoned. Who can it be at this hour? Some emergency? I rush into the bathroom. I must steady myself, otherwise I'll shave my nose off. Knock, knock on the bathroom door. What is it?

'The post,' says the housekeeper.

Ooh, I breathe a sigh of relief. Ooh. Relief. 'Many letters?' I ask.

'Three.'

'Official or ordinary?'

"One looks like a cablegram and the other two aren't particularly distinguished,' the housekeeper answers. I could ask her to smell one of the envelopes. That might betray a letter from some gentle lady-friend. Do ladies intentionally scent letters? They explain that they carry them around in their handbags and they (the envelopes, that is) get mixed up with face-powder. That accounts for the scent. I remember the word 'cablegram'.

'I'll be ready in a moment,' I say through the door. Wonder who would send me a cablegram? Wonder why the post comes at nine? I get letters from the Continent, and a packet-boat arrives at Dover at about seven—so I probably get my letters first post. That is service.

I enter my private study still half-dressed, in a dressing-gown. A cablegram always interests me, especially if it's from some foreign strand. Was it the King of Something-Land—a wise and portly gentleman who rules over a small group of islands in the

Pacific, telling me he had reached harbour and Paradise (the name of his island)? He had been a patient and had cheerfully offered me haven and a post in his court. 'Original, having a surgeon for a prime minister,' he said. 'Could do both jobs in one.'

I opened the cablegram. It was a long white strip of paper and bore a government stamp that sternly requested Priority. That made me feel good. A thought rushed through my head. 'I'm being sent to the front,' I said. War had already been declared for some time and I had previously signed an undertaking to go out with the Royal Air Force. But I was wrong. Thoughts that come in rushes generally are wrong.

It was a polite query from a Dominion government. It said: 'What is your position in respect to hospital appointment with us?' Signed Department of Health and Public Welfare. Now why should a Dominion government send me a telegram saying . . . ? Oh, of course, I remember. The war seemed to have driven everything from my mind. I had written prior to this dreadful catastrophe asking if there were any vacancies, and this was my reply. Yes, that's right, that was the reply. A favourable one, too. It's nice receiving favourable replies, even if you know you can't do anything about them.

It happened that a few months before outbreak of war I had decided to venture forth for a while from the hospitable heart of England. A mother with so many children could spare me to go out to the four

corners of the earth where her flag flies and try to do something useful in her empire. It would be a change. Nothing fails like success. Perhaps I was growing old in Harley Street, getting conventions pleasantly knocked into my head and meeting too many of the 'right' people. 'I'll give myself a holiday from myself,' I said, 'pack up my bags and go somewhere where I can pioneer.'

My first and only application was for a highly paid government position in the New World. I waited to see what would happen, and the surprising did happen. I never expected to get an offer or even an answer, except perhaps a politely typed letter telling me the position was filled. That's very humble for a Mr. Surgeon of Harley Street, you say? Perhaps it is. Perhaps it is not. But I know a good number of better men than myself who could have applied for it and got the job. But they didn't get it—perhaps they hadn't applied—anyway there was no point in wasting time in speculations.

Two round thousand pounds a year, free maintenance, a house and private practice permitted were the conditions of the appointment. A plum, one might say, which even a fairly successful surgeon cannot close his mouth to. Well, providence had selected me. Thanks very much—for nothing. Or perhaps thanks very much all the same.

Three months had elapsed before I heard from this Dominion Public Department. Three long months and my practice, in common with other

practices in Harley Street, dwindled. People had more to occupy their minds than to care about their bodies. Bodies could wait for better times. A telegram had informed me on August 28th—that is, six days before the declaration of war—that I had been chosen for the appointment. What a joy! No more worries over the salaries I had to pay to my assistant and secretaries. I did not wish to add to the long list of unemployment. Besides, I wouldn't send a cheque to the landlord of my flat with such a heavy heart. I would even sign 'Yours sincerely'. Two thousand pounds clear, a hospital with a hundred beds at my disposal. Chief surgeon of a whole province larger than Yorkshire and the possibility of exploration of a new country—the prospect of new friends, new interests, a dream come true. . . .

'You'll be late for the hospital, Mr. Sava,' my housekeeper warned me. 'You haven't drunk your second cup of tea yet and I'm sure it's cold.'

This was prosaic reality if you like. I promised her to finish my breakfast, but I could not shake myself from my thoughts over that first telegram. I was actually feeling the same sensation that came then after such a long expectancy. I remembered that I was feeling rewarded, praised. Fate was stroking my head, whispering to me of the new land I was going to see. That was August 28th. I hadn't looked at the newspaper. The cablegram had disturbed me, otherwise I should already have scanned the headlines and learnt what Hitler had done, Mussolini demanded,

Chamberlain suggested, and Stalin plotted. The world news was the pivot of my hopes. I turned avidly to the pages.

Black letters told me the news. Somebody said that if . . . and somebody answered and somebody else did not bother to answer but said his 'patience was exhausted' and the Nazi armies were massed on the Polish front ready to attack the wicked Poles who were supposed to be threatening the Germans with an invasion. I smiled at this peculiar truth. I used to get annoyed. Now I only smile whenever anything happens. It might be an earthquake, a war or a pronouncement by Adolf Hitler. It's all the same. The man, and what he says, is a calamity and the only thing I could do as I watched my prospects fade away was to smile.

'This is no time', I said, 'to fare forth in search of new adventures.' Adventure—if such war is—was knocking at my door. It was a vile sort of opportunity. It was a calamity and I knew that my job was to stay where I was.

Beauty, gentleness, love, humanity, these were coming to an end. It was tempting to flee and get away 'from it all', but I who had travelled the earth in its good times, and had seen the serene beauty of Italian villages, had tasted wines and drunk the mountain air, I, who knew Germany, the Rhine, the cathedral-splintered moon at Cologne, I who loved Sussex and its simple beauty, the quietness of the downs at night, the rustle of trees in a Berkshire lane,

animals drinking from a pool, life going its own way, meandering unchanging, I knew all this was to pass and something else come to take its place. I would take the new conditions, the new world as I had loved the old and serve the new one with my best abilities.

I had seen death. I knew too well the meaning of partings, but I also knew that I was part of all these things and that I too had my role predestined in the catastrophe.

'Glad to accept appointment in event of no war. Intend joining armed forces if war. Await your further instructions. George Sava.' So I had replied to the first cablegram—six days before the war.

And six days later war came. I had given the right answer. I would remain to work amidst the people I loved. That wasn't heroism. It was a job. But it would have been heroism had I had the good sense to have foreseen all these things twenty years before. I might have trained as an airman, a soldier, or a sailor. After all, I had spent some years at the naval academy at Kronstadt. Would not that have been a better mission to follow? Where was the healing knife to lead me now?

Again I glanced at the second telegram, which I still held in my hand, while my thoughts had wandered back. The Public Health Department of the Dominion still wanted my services. But for me there was no other choice. The same answer had to be dispatched.

The patient hands of the clock turn, I must hurry on.

II

TEN O'CLOCK: MORNING

*

'My overcoat, please,' I said to my housekeeper. 'You've made me late again.' The fierce expression on my face melts before the innocent gaze of my housekeeper, who, good soul that she is, is very, very rarely late.

Her timely admonitions to watch the clock have saved me many an unpleasant encounter with an irate guest or patient. Not that I ever intend to be late. No, not that. I remember what Louis said about promptitude, and I expect you do. Lateness is merely something that happens, like the weather, for instance, or some other unforeseen and unpredictable thing. I just am late. It may only be a few seconds, a minute or two or perhaps a couple of hours. The degree of lateness doesn't matter. A man will usually tolerate about a quarter of an hour's lateness. He understands shaving or getting out of bed a few minutes later, or lingering over the newspaper. He appre-

ciates that leisure is one of the boons of civilized life; a quarter of an hour's grace he will always give you. After that he gets restive. Twitches with his collar and begins to wonder whether you owe him some money. Then he calls you names. He begins with simple homely names like 'damn fool' or perhaps lets himself go with a 'blast him', until he graduates to the more refined terms of abuse which are unprintable.

The lady is different. In any case she hates being early herself, so she considers it a sort of *lèse majesté* to find that you've abrogated to yourself her attribute. I am speaking now strictly unprofessionally. She is amused at your insolence. She asks herself whether you imagine you're some lady-killer whose rendezvous are the highlight of any day in the week. She feels you are insolent. Yes, positively insolent, if you think that. She will in fact discover all sorts of reasons for your being late. Even if you are a doctor and have the best excuse in the world, she will still find some other reason lurking in her head. He doesn't care. That's what it is. Perhaps he has no breeding? Does he realize it's an intolerable insult? I shan't wait another half-hour longer. Not one small minute. Then she looks at her watch. She has only been waiting for five minutes since her arrival, which was, of course, twenty minutes late, so naturally she adds her lateness to yours and it comes to twenty-five minutes. You, on the other hand, may be in some other part of the lounge eating your heart out with

anxiety, or perhaps you have observed her arrival and noted the twenty minutes inexactitude, and being of a fierce, revengeful nature you decide to administer some medicine. You keep her waiting for another five minutes, bring her impatience almost to bursting point before you approach.

'Oh, hello,' you say.

'Hello,' she replies non-committally. 'I'm sorry I'm late,' says she, 'I've only just this minute arrived.'

You pretend to believe her, and so save her pride, and you wonder why you ever had to make an appointment with a woman.

This of course is neither here nor there. Nationality has something to do with impromptitude. Russians, for instance. Everybody knows about Russians. Everybody has spent at least a quarter of the acquaintanceship with a Russian waiting for him or her to turn up and to say, 'Oooooh Aee aam soreee Aee aam laate.' All very softly and prettily. They then offer to commit suicide, so disconsolate are they at their discourtesy—but not, of course, before dinner. No Russian has ever killed himself before dinner. History tells us that Ivan the Terrible refused to die before he had a large, thirty-course meal. History doesn't say whether it was the meal that killed him. He died cheerful, however, and the big heart of all the Russias sighed deeply. The Little Father had died like a Russian, with a pot of caviare inside him and innumerable zakuskis.

So it is with me. Peccavi. I have often sinned. I make unpunctuality an art. The only time I am conscious of time is when I am on time. Then I am frankly astonished. And the only time I am really on time is when there is an emergency. I am then frequently before time and get arrested for speeding. There are other times when I am punctual. Then the clock is fast or I forget the time of the appointment and arrive an hour too early and curse and fume at the ill-manners of my appointee. Nitchevo!

Nitchevo is a preposterous word. It used to be said that Nitchevo was a stronger tyrant than the Tsar in Moscow. Nitchevo was everywhere. In the civil service, in business, in pleasure, in immorality, in marriages, in houses. Everywhere. Nitchevo was a little tin god whom every Russian used to worship much like a sacred ikon. It means literally, 'Well, never mind'. Better still perhaps, 'Well, and who cares?' Or more truly still, 'Well—we can't help it, after all—aren't we all the sons of Adam?'

This Nitchevo undermined our political as well as our social system. It's a sort of passive rebellion against established laws. It is rather clever; especially when all you do is to submit to those laws. You can't be detected. It's foolproof and it's hopeless. For all I know the Bolshevik contribution towards Russian civilization may be that they have suppressed the thought behind the word, if not the word itself. I cheerfully imagine that the 'purges' had something to do with Nitchevo. You were allowed to say

it so many times and to work on it a few times less—but when you exceeded your quota of Nitchevo's—off you went for your morning execution—for which you were probably late anyway! Nitchevo, you got killed and that's all that mattered. So, Nitchevo again. Oh shades of Peter the Great! better would it have been to have banned the word Nitchevo than to cut off people's beards and whiskers, better than beating Charles the Swede, better than building a city on the Baltic marshes. Still, you probably said the word yourself. Even you, great Tsar. . . .

Talking of Tsars, my appointment for this very morning at ten o'clock was with a Tsar. Well perhaps not quite a Tsar. A little Tsar. Not that he was little in size. I mean only in so far as his domains. He was a very large, handsome man. He was a Polynesian; and then something else. He was a king.

Now you don't get a king for a patient every day. I've had one or two in my time, but, generally speaking, they are very rare and don't come all the way to Harley Street to consult George Sava. But, as I say, one or two did, and this royal gentleman was also a king, so I was glad that I was nearly on time, as I wouldn't like to have caused any offence. Manners and customs differ, and whereas a European might have made a few caustic remarks about imprompti-tude in general, a man no less civilized in these days of travel, missionary schools, the wireless and so on, might still have deemed it an irreparable insult not only to himself but also to his ancestors; and I,

George Sava, surgeon, might have found myself on an operating table having to have my head sewn up. This was not the case, however.

His Highness had a heavenly name and he was the acme of politeness and good humour. He graciously called me his son. He was tall as a palm-tree—well, not quite—and was lithe, with a magnificent physique, and his skin was a beautiful tan. He seemed very vital, as if the sun that had shone on him so long was now giving him the energy to battle with our harsher autumn weather. His eyes were melancholy and dark. But enough of this. He is impatient to tell you his story himself.

He came to England, he said with a courtly bow, because he needed treatment. He confessed, with a touching childishness, that he had not come specially to see me. My name and fame, great as it was, he said politely, had not penetrated to the other side of the world where the Solomon Archipelago rears its small palm-tree covered islands. But he promised me that when he returned he would speak favourably of me. I thanked his Highness for his generous words and assured him that we, on the contrary, had heard of his coming and had awaited him with impatience. This beautiful lie pleased him. He smiled and showed his white teeth and again bowed with a simple, noble dignity.

With a cheerful heart, he explained, he undertook an eight-week journey through strange seas and stranger lands, suffering the discomfort of embar-

kation and disembarkation and risking his life with our weather, which he thought was barbaric. I assured him that the sun shone at intervals even in England and told him that the weather prophets were saying it would be mild this week with some sun in the south-east. He countered this perfectly honest piece of B.B.C. news by telling me that his prophets at home were much more accurate. They did not change their weather prophecies every few hours. But this was not the worst part of his journey. He had gone through seas infested with sharks and had lost a faithful henchman who had vaingloriously leapt over the side of the liner to do battle with one of these sea monsters—and had got swallowed up.

Moreover, he had heard that war had broken out between us and the Germans and had been told that they had sent long steel sharks to prey on boats and swallow them up. I applauded his description of the U-boats and asked him whether he had encountered any of these steel sharks.

No, he said, he had not, otherwise he would gladly, for the sake of his friend the King of England, have sacrificed one of his henchmen, who would dexterously have put the monster out of action by a deft blow of his stabbing knife.

I was not going to disillusion him by suggesting that he should send in his idea and his henchmen to the Admiralty.

'And you weren't really afraid?' I asked him again.

He laughed. 'They wouldn't dare! They wouldn't dare to swallow me up. I would be an indigestible fish for Benito Mossolani,' he told me through his interpreter who himself did not bother to give the correct pronunciation to the dictator's name.

I explained that we were not fighting Benito Mussolini's steel sharks; that we were at peace with Benito. But it was no use.

'Aren't you fighting a dictator?' His Highness asked me. I agreed. 'Well, then who else could it be but Mossolani?'

It appeared from our subsequent conversation that the only dictator His Highness had heard of was Mussolini. (I wonder what Adolf would have thought of that.) But there it was and it was no use trying to teach a Polynesian king history, especially since I had come to treat him. In any case he had lost nothing in not being familiar with Mussolini's counterpart, the Reich Dictator. His Highness might have proved curious and might have questioned me too closely. He did ask me what the steel sharks ate, but I forget what I told him. 'Ships,' I think I said, 'and sailors and sometimes women and children.'

Wicked, he replied, very wicked. In days gone by when cannibalism was favoured in his islands, they never ate anything so indigestible as ships or so tender as women and children.

I remarked on their good sense. 'But', I said, 'Your Highness commanded me to see you on some business of medicine.'

Indeed, he said, that was so. He had sailed the seven seas, travelled with steel sharks around the ship, and ordinary ones, risked his life. He had done all these things . . . and . . .

And can you guess what he wanted to do after all those risks he ran? I will tell you. He had come to England to have his nose changed!

The truth has to be told even at the risk of spoiling an amusing situation. Honesty gets the better of the novelist. It was not I who changed His Highness's nose. Indeed, when I saw him he had changed his nose, which looked very shapely and serviceable, as far as I could judge.

No, what had happened was that a friend of mine, an eminent plastic surgeon had performed the operation on His Highness's nose; but it appears that the unfortunate king developed inguinal hernia and my friend, the plastic surgeon, had suggested to him that I should correct this misfortune with another operation—which was, of course, the only way that it could be corrected. The king was a trusting sort of fellow and had agreed, and that's how I happened to be on the carpet in front of his bed in an exclusive nursing-home near the Street. It was hernia which was to bring me another royal patient—and perhaps another medal for services rendered.

However, a few days before the operation we became fast friends, and I learnt the whole history of his dynasty and the island from the sixteenth century onwards.

He boastingly claimed descent from a Scotsman! His Highness was full of surprises.

'My ancestor', said he, 'was a certain Scots gentleman. The little we know about him is that he ran away from a big ship where the captain had treated him cruelly. He was a mere lad when he decided to abandon the navy of the then and now ever-glorious Elizabeth Regina. So he cut adrift in a pinnace at night and sailed for the first island he could find. It happened to be the island of my ancestors.

'At that time the island was ruled by a lady, a very capable and charming woman whose spirit is ever with me. She liked the boy and when he grew up she made him her headman or Prime Minister, as you say, and he did battle for the island against all invaders and became a hero, learning our language and our customs and becoming one of us. And finally, after he had shown his prowess, she let him fall in love with one of her daughters and so it happened, when the queen died, the Scotsman and the daughter of the queen ruled the island. I am their distant child,' he said.

The king stopped talking and the interpreter told me the whole story. He also added that the present king was a very good and great person. He was king, spiritual head, judge, and hangman of his island and was very popular.

But his best tale was to wait until after the operation.

I decided to give His Highness a local anaesthetic.

I mention this because of his childlike innocence. He simply could not understand how he could be cut into pieces and still not feel any pain. It was a great novelty and he even wanted me to operate on him again and again simply for the joy of the thing.

'How is it you do it?' he asked.

'Syringe . . . water . . . prick in skin . . . and no pain,' I explained carefully, demonstrating with my hands. He asked his interpreter what a syringe meant, and then argued with him for some time before he understood. The water and the prick in the skin and 'no pain' he followed in English. It appeared that he understood English, but was too shy to try it out on me. Towards the second week, when he was well on the way to recovery, I prevailed on him to talk English to me.

He began by thanking me for what I had done for him and regretting that I would not agree to perform any further operations on him. Then he struck on a bright idea.

'Come . . . Manogha . . . Me king Manogha . . . big island. . . . You prick king in Manogha and cut him up . . . No pain. . . .'

I told him how much I would have enjoyed going to Manogha, where he was king, but there were no further operations necessary, and besides I had my duties in my own country.

He was very mournful and began trying to seduce me.

'Have plenty wives . . .' he suggested. I told him

that I sympathized with him, but he did not understand, and as we had dismissed the interpreter, he did not follow the remark.

'Give plenty wives you . . . coconuts and pigs. . . . You very happy Manogha island . . . sun . . . many sharks to catch . . . not much work. . . . You can prick and cut my people. I let you prick as many as you like. I pay you much . . . pay with copra. . . .'

What was copra? I asked. I knew vaguely, but I wanted a better definition.

'Copra? Copra come from big coconut from big trees on island. Big fruit . . . ripe, fall down, cut pieces, dry sun, very very hot sun . . . copra!'

Ave Caesar!—I mean Julius. He would have envied this laconic explanation or been annoyed at the similarity of style: Veni, vidi, vici—copra!

'No,' I said, 'I would not know what to do with copra.'

'Lots of copra I give you. You sell to white men on ship, they give you money. . . .'

'Ah,' I said.

'Money no good in Manogha . . . no buy . . . only copra buy . . . change for copra . . . cotton shirts, leg-trousers . . . or grass skirts, toys . . . drink. We happy people. We eat, drink, and catch sharks. . . .'

Then he told me how he used to go shark-catching in his youth. Apparently in Manogha this sport was as popular as fox-hunting, although a little more dangerous.

It appears that sharks liked basking in the warm

shallow water of a lagoon and the hunters, some of them mere boys, would dive into the water at the shore's edge until they came to the subterranean caves made by the coral formations of some of the islands. They would hide there until they spied a lurking shark enjoying itself in the warm water. The shark would be swimming on its front, unaware of premeditated attack, and, as everyone knows, a shark has to turn on its back before it can fight. The boys, however, would out-manœuvre the shark and stab it in its unsuspecting belly.

'Big prick for shark . . . him die . . . no pain,' parodied His Highness of my explanation of local anaesthetic. 'You like catch shark?'

I said that I hadn't tried. The worst I had done was to shoot some grouse in Scotland.

'Shark meat great delicacy . . . fry with coco-milk. You like good food? Tasty food? I like. . . .'

I agreed that I too liked tasty food.

His Highness turned out to be a gourmet of the rarest order. He also tried to lure me to Manogha solely because he said he wanted to let me taste some of the good things on this earth.

Rainbow-fish, he told me, were very flabby, but they looked beautiful in the morning as you watched them swimming in the shadows of the lagoon many feet under where you stood. Or moon-fish; they tasted less fishy than the rainbow-fish—but it was largely a matter of taste. Then there was pota—a sort of spinach, only it had to be cooked very care-

fully, otherwise it would burn your throat; like stinging nettles, I imagine, from the king's description. Also he promised me some delicious 'chevrettes'—crawfish, that his servants gathered by torchlight during the night. There was the tuna fish caught beyond the reefs—a dangerous adventure, he joked, but an excellent meal. There were yams cooked in the fire-embers. You never ate with a spoon. The king could not accustom himself to a spoon. It clattered horribly against his beautiful white teeth, he complained to the nursing home matron, and was allowed to eat in his own fashion, which he did remarkably deftly and politely. His wrists waved in the air with the elegance of a ballet dancer.

'Ah,' he said, 'Manogha—you must come there—sometime,' when he saw that I could not come with him on his recovery. He gave me his visiting card, which read in a comic-pathetic way: 'King Manogha Island, Big House in Centre. Ships call once every three months. . . .'

I promised faithfully I should one day visit him, and he said how glad he would be to receive me and asked me how many years I would care to live with him. But I had no intention of following the example of his Scots ancestor.

'I will come,' I said, 'one day. Then you can kill an army of baby-pigs and prepare all the yams in your kingdom and I'll drink our health in coconut wine. . . .' With that, we parted.

He returned to Manogha shortly afterwards, com-

plete with his new nose and a small scar on his tummy.

'My people, when they see small scar on my tummy,' he said, 'they will all want small scars. You come, Mr. Sava, you come to Manogha. . . .'

I promised I would.

As I stepped outside the nursing home that morning, I looked at my watch. I was already a quarter of an hour late for my next appointment. But who cared? Nitchevo! Manogha had been calling me with its star-shaped shadows of palm-trees and its lagoons where rainbow-fish that were flabby and moon-fish strolled around the coral and knew nothing of the sharks, the steel sharks, the U-boats. Where the people stayed in the sun and grew brown and laughed as little children.

III

ELEVEN O'CLOCK: MORNING

*

I left my royal patient pondering on the blissful innocence of his subjects; a people without the amenities of civilization and without air-raid shelters, balloon-barrages, and sirens; but then, I remembered that all men's achievements have been obtained at a cost, and I ceased pondering and succumbing to the memories of which he had spoken. Manogha seemed very far from the busy scenes around me. It belonged to the legendary islands of my childhood, where John Silver, the tale of the Coral Island, and *Gulliver's Travels* got irreparably mixed. What would my memories be in another twenty years—of this time in which I am living? Would they too seem distant as a fairy-tale, as distant as Manogha and its jovial king?

It was eleven o'clock. Appointments always seem to come by the hour to us doctors. I remembered that I had made an appointment with a foreign colleague, a doctor, who had fled from the Hitler terror when

his country was occupied a few weeks previously. Together with many others he had been driven from his country. To have remained would have meant the concentration camp. Europe seems to have returned to the days of Galileo, when scientists of the eminence of Einstein were persecuted.

This doctor arrived in England but was refused permission to practise. He was grateful undoubtedly for the friendliness and encouragement he got here, and was able, through the good offices of an influential friend, to secure permission to stay indefinitely in England.

The medical profession, being organized as it is, is a very crowded one. Doctors crowd into fashionable areas and are few in the poorer ones or in not easily accessible districts. The rights and wrongs of such a situation can be laid at the door of the commercialism which has infected doctoring as much as any profession. So long as the fashionable street pays more than any other place, it will naturally be the Mecca of the best and the most capable as well as those who hope that a name-plate in the street will give them the reputation they are unable to establish on their skill alone.

However, what I mean to say is, that the refugee doctors have felt a grudge against the medical profession because of its stringent regulations and because it has not been as helpful as perhaps they might have wished. Sympathy one must feel and appreciation of their plight, but an already over-

crowded profession cannot allow even a minority to come in and displace those who have an *a priori* claim. Blame the commercialized status of doctors if you like, but not the harassed Medical Association, which must have suffered as much as anyone else at its impotence to help its foreign colleagues.

Undoubtedly many capable men have been lost to science in this way, but again it is the competitive and anarchic state of medical organization which is to be blamed and not the individuals who compose the profession. I, personally, believe that there can never be 'enough' doctors. People are everywhere in constant need of attention from specialists in the laboratories, from surgeons and practitioners. The best way of serving this multitude has not yet been devised, simply because every doctor is actually competing against every other and competition, while adjudged healthy in business circles, is not always healthy in medicine. Of course, the best man will get to the top. He does so in any sort of organization, even in a jungle civilization, but unfortunately he carries with him on his starry path of progress a whole line of satellites trying hard to imitate him and concentrating their work in limited spheres, whereas they might be much more useful in another.

I am not advocating state control, although the thought doesn't frighten me. I merely plead that doctors rationalize their talents and their time and market their 'commodity' by getting together and working out prices and areas of activity in the same

way as any other sensible business is run which gets too big for individual dealing; as, for instance, the Milk Marketing Board, the London Transport, etc.

I am saying all this merely to explain why in existing circumstances it was impossible for the Medical Association to open its doors widely and generously and let all those who knocked come in. There are probably a good many other reasons. . . .

'Any help you can render to my friend, Dr. ——, will be appreciated as a personal favour.' Thus wrote a wealthy patient of mine about the doctor I was going to see in my consulting rooms at eleven.

As I was walking the few hundred yards which separate the nursing home I had visited and my rooms, I was thinking about the letter I had received from my patient. More truthfully, I was thinking about the patient himself.

I had treated him after a very serious accident and in the period of recovery we had become good friends. The most curious thing about Mr. Mrasov was not his wealth—although wealth, generally speaking, affords plenty of pleasant curiosity—no, it was the fact that Mr. Mrasov was perhaps one of the few Russians I know who, in spite of the revolution and their personal loss as a result of this historical phenomenon, were able to start from scratch and accumulate enormous wealth. And what was still more amazing was to find a Russian who, having accumulated the wealth, was able to keep it and administer it judiciously to a large number of people's benefit. This

was a notable effort and due entirely to an indefatigable nature, ability, and determination to succeed. In fact, Mr. Mrasov had all the qualifications of a millionaire. He understood the meaning of organization; he had an appreciation of money, not for what it would buy for him, but for what it would do for others. But despite all these things (and there are many more things that Mr. Mrasov did in his lifetime which could only be disclosed in an autobiography) he met with an accident.

This is how it happened. He was travelling by tube when.... Apparently all sorts of men travel by tube, even millionaires. It's cheaper and it's certainly quicker. So the masses have some amenities that the very rich haven't got unless they stoop to stooping in crowded tube coaches, strap-hanging and walking cheerfully with the wrong foot on moving stairways, or having their breakfasts disturbed by lifts. However, Mr. Mrasov was a simple man, as a great man should be, and no-one in the tube could have mistaken Mr. Mrasov for a millionaire, and indeed I am sure he is glad that they didn't. Just imagine people recognizing millionaires! Film-stars are loved for their charm and beauty, and people struggle to tear the clothes off them for a souvenir, but what would happen to a millionaire in a tube-train with a lot of anxious taxpayers, women who want mink coats, and girls who haven't enough money to buy lipsticks? I expect they would pick up our millionaire and shake him. There is a credulity amongst people about mil-

lionaires which is astonishing. They would shake him and wait for the gold to come pouring out of his ears.

But as I have said, Mr. Mrasov did not look like a millionaire. His clothes were perhaps immaculate and Savile Row. A few teeth in his head are probably of gold, the rest are beautifully kept. His head is large—he is a man who thinks. But otherwise his linear beauty is not extraordinary and so he is able to sit around in tubes and go to places without being followed by a group of importunate and unfortunate people who either want to touch him for luck or for money. Not that Mr. Mrasov wasn't generous, but he wasn't everybody's godfather; had he been, he wouldn't have been a millionaire, but a crank who stood on a street corner giving sweets to children as they came from school.

But the very fate that made Mr. Mrasov look like an ordinary man, and allowed him to travel in an Underground tube without molestation, did not immunize him from accident.

The purpose of this particular journey on which he met with an accident was, I believe, to meet some business associates in a West-End hotel. A dreadful collision occurred at Charing Cross station (an accident on the Underground which most people will remember). Mr. Mrasov happily was in a centre carriage and was able to escape with a compound fracture of his right leg; not a very dangerous accident, but one which could gather enough complica-

tions to make it imperative to sever the leg or at least prescribe a lengthy treatment.

Why Mr. Mrasov called me to attend to his injury, I do not know. There were many capable orthopaedic surgeons in London and certainly amongst them men of greater genius than myself. I venture to guess, however, that Mr. Mrasov was motivated largely by the fact that he could speak no English and preferred to find a surgeon to whom he could talk to his heart's content.

Russians are great talkers and great eaters. Mr. Mrasov was both, and added another accomplishment to his stock of virtues. He was a great doer, but Mr. Mrasov was now a patient and, rich or poor—a compound fracture of the leg is no small matter; but I managed to attend to the injury in time and to set the fracture satisfactorily, and all that was left was to see how quickly he got better.

In the meantime, I was introduced to his charming wife and daughter, and we spent many hours reminiscing over the good old days whenever I visited my patient at his hotel and made my medical examination. How we loved rummaging amongst our memories and bringing out the twenty-year-old faded memories of people and places of our former motherland—Russia.

Were you ever in St. Petersburg during the season? Ah, you were in the Naval Academy at Kronstadt. How well I remember your handsome uniforms. I went to a lyceum. . . . Remember the coronation?

No, of course not, you wouldn't—too young. Oh, you had a house in Yalta?—marvellous place. Better than Monte—better than all the Riviera. What colours! What a climate! Yes, Mr. Sava, those were the days....

And so we used to speak until the hours passed one by one and the prickings of my conscience became more and more intense and I had to rush to my appointments at breakneck speed, avoiding lamp-posts and policemen by inches. Yes, Mr. Mrasov, those were the days.

Soon, too soon I confess for my liking—his leg healed and he was able to be round and about. This was a purely selfish attitude on my part—but I was deprived of his charming company and that of his family, and our store of reminiscences was not yet exhausted. He went away to Switzerland to recuperate fully, but this was really an excuse—he had business in Switzerland.

And now, of course, we must come back to the refugee doctor whom I was to meet at eleven o'clock. Mr. Mrasov wrote to me in April and asked me—well, I have already said what he asked me. 'Do everything to help him—he is a refugee and a friend of mine—help him to get on his feet.' All right, I will, I wrote back. I'll do all I can.

I invited the doctor to tea, where, together with a friend of mine, a young Russian, we listened with amazement to the story the refugee had to unfold. We had read of the holocausts caused by the brutal

Nazi invaders. There had been newspaper stories—about 'a people we do not know', as Mr. Chamberlain put it in an unhappy phrase at the time of the Munich conference. Now, listening to a tale of crime, blunder, and inhumanity, we were able to picture to ourselves the meaning of Nazi civilization at its best. We were able all the more to appreciate the brave stoicism with which the Czech people met the invader. With deep melancholy silence, with a resignation so true to the Slavonic character, they watched the foreign army march into their sacred places where only a few hours previously fluttered the proud democratic flag of a free people. But they turned their backs on the invader and refused to have any dealing with the devil and all his works. There were, of course, a few traitors who sought to buy sinecures and comfortable positions for themselves at the expense of their country's shame. Of these the doctor did not speak. 'They were not Czechs,' he said. 'We have tasted liberty for twenty years. It was not Beneš that betrayed us, it was the faint hearts of the democratic leaders.'

I remember we said something about justice finally triumphing over might, but the refugee was inconsolable. After all, these were easy words to utter while a heroic nation was being sold into slavery. One day, we said, the patience of the democracies will be exhausted. We then smiled at our words. One day Austria had gone, Spain also, and now Czechoslovakia. One day the patience of the demo-

cracies would be exhausted, we said. Hope, we said. One day all men will be free. One day. . . .

He said that the Czechs should have fought. 'You would have helped us,' he said. "You could not watch us being drowned in our blood.'

We could not, we agreed, but we had seen other democracies drown in their own blood. We had heard the cock crow thrice—Austria, Spain. Would we do it again?

No, we said—all three of us, never again. This time we would take up the rifle and fight. It was not a matter of sentiment or hatred for another race. It was a matter of principle. Call it another religious war if you like, but when freedom becomes a nation's religion, that nation is hallowed not only in the memory of history but in the hearts of all good men —who seek freedom for themselves and for others. We hated war, we said, but we would fight.

It was on this note we parted.

A few days later when I had drafted out my letter to the British Medical Association asking their kind indulgence on behalf of my friend, and asking them whether they would give him permission to practise, I received another from the self-same doctor, telling me that he had obtained the necessary permission to sit for the English degree and was assured that if he passed this examination he would be allowed to practise. Nothing, I thought, could be fairer than such conditions, and I was very happy that in this case the B.M.A. were able to do something.

The reminiscence of all these things made me hurry to the eleven o'clock appointment. War had already broken out between this country and the Nazis. At last we were moving to avenge the injustice done to the Czechs and Slovaks. We were moving, perhaps, to establish a better world order. How glad my friend would be! *Le moment de gloire est arrivé.*

He must be burning with a desire to enlist with the legion that was being formed in France, I thought. He must be. . . . And then a thought struck me. I remembered that this was not a war of brawn. This was a war where cunning had to be met with cunning, a war of booby-traps, military, economic, and political. It was also a war on such a large scale that all one's resources had to be conserved, and doctors were resources as much as gunpowder and battleships.

Would he realize this? Would he be prepared to forgo the natural instinct of an outraged man who seeks vengeance for his country and the principles of democracy and liberty?

Without waiting for my secretary to introduce the doctor into my study, I walked into the waiting-room and shook him warmly by the hand. We then went into my apartment. I wanted to offer him something to drink, he looked so excited. Tea at eleven o'clock in the morning was out of the question and alcoholic-refreshment I do not keep—except a little medicinal brandy—and that was in the custody of the

nurse, so I offered him a cigarette (which I went into my secretary's office to borrow, as I do not smoke myself and my guest-box was empty).

Clouded in wreaths of smoke we talked and talked. He was vibrant with joy. At last! At last a chance to liberate his country. Hitler's Germany could not stand up to the combined might of the Allies. He could not wage a long war. Russia, a Slav nation, would remain neutral. The progress of the great democracies was assured. He was glad, he told me, to hear that I, too, was doing my modest job in trying to win the war. He had heard that I had volunteered for service abroad with the forces, but that I had been put into an executive position in one of London's largest hospitals. He told me that a Czech legion had been formed under the auspices of the former President of Czechoslovakia—Beneš, whom my friend still referred to as the President. These immigrants would fight to the end.

Was he trying to say good-bye to me? I wondered. A few minutes' silence followed as he became engrossed in his own thoughts.

'I am a doctor,' he said. 'My job is to save life and not to take it. Now that hundreds of English doctors will be needed with the services, I might perhaps be useful in attending the civil population. They cannot be left without doctors. The war is also a war against women and children. I believe that my first duty is to humanity; and then to my country.'

I was glad he said that. I know what passion is and

how a man can be carried off by the rightness of his cause and can be made to sacrifice his life needlessly. That is not heroism. Modern war demands that one sacrifices one's life at its biggest price. Milton had said something about 'they also serve who only stand and wait'. Better than fury, however justified; better than hatred and revenge; better it was to conserve one's talents and abilities for the new world to come.

Some must go forth with rifles in their hands, some must brave the shot and shell of battle and die and be wounded—but even they, the front-line men, are not the only ones that die and get wounded. Spain has taught us a bitter lesson on air bombardment. It was the doctors and the nurses in the wards and operating theatres who had to work under difficult conditions at the risk of their lives. The front line included women and children. It was these my Czech friend wanted to serve; the weak and the innocent, the sons and the daughters of the country that had given him haven.

I admire his sagacity. I admire his self-control. Another man would have called for a rifle and wasted a life which might have been useful to the many thousands to come. I applaud his wisdom, and yet I know that in my heart, there is a deep yearning and some searching of conscience.

IV

TWELVE O'CLOCK: NOON

*

My twelve o'clock appointment was not strictly professional. I was going to a farewell party. A number of my Italian friends, patients and the relatives of patients, were leaving England's hospitable shores during those fateful months after August 1939, when no-one knew who was going to fight who. Was there some secret clause in the pact between Germany and Italy? If the diplomatists, men skilled in the art of knowing everything even before the newspapers, could not tell, how could one expect the many simple, Italian families who had been domiciled here in England for years to know?

Torn by loyalties, they nevertheless decided that if their mother country went to war, they would rather be England's enemies afar off, than at home on her doorstep—for the simple reason that they could not conceive being 'enemies', having to regard their second country as an adversary.

I am happy to count among my numerous friends and patients many Italians. They range from official representatives of the Crown of Italy to the humblest waiters in Soho's restaurants, and they all have one thing in common—charm. That makes them such good diplomats and waiters.

You may travel the length and the breadth of Italy from Piedmont to Sicily, and you will find them a polite, hospitable, and gay people. How many civilizations flow in their veins! Aeneas, the seducer of Dido, a Trojan, the blue-eyed Sabines, Etruscans, Sardinians, Moors, Goths, and Vandals, each have contributed to make a temperamental amalgam and a virtuosity to be found only in Italians.

I have cut many different-coloured skins of princes, prelates, ambassadors, engineers, bankers, millionaires, actors, and actresses, the ugly and the beautiful, but of all nationalities and types I have never got so many exuberant thanks and handshakes as from the Italians.

But before you attempt to treat an Italian patient you must be well versed in a certain rudimentary technique, otherwise you are doomed to failure. Doomed out of hand and condemned as nothing less than a butcher. There are certain refinements you simply must understand. In other words, you must grasp the Latin psychology peculiar to the Italian as distinct from his brother nations of France and Spain.

Many years—certainly over ten—I have spent treating and operating on Italians. My success—and

nothing less than a fine word like success will do—my Italian friends assure me, has depended largely on the effort I expend on preliminaries. I get to understand them intimately. I find out about their families, the number of children they have, I see photos of their childhood, I discuss Naples or swear by Milan, I express a preference for certain dishes, and tell them that Rome is the most beautiful city in the world (which I really think it is). Nothing so indiscreet as an inquiry into the nature of their own personal complaint will do. That would immediately make them polite and silent.

There is a childlike simplicity about them and a virile curiosity of what life is and what it holds. They are not necessarily introspective. I would personally say that they were drunk with life. They love life and hate death, brutality, and coarseness. In other words they carry all the markings of an ancient civilization.

Quite honestly, I believe they fear death. They have lived too long in the history of the world as soldiers, marauders, empire-builders, and conquerors not to find these pleasures stale. Fascism has come and Fascism will go. It will leave a little or much, but nothing will change a people temperamentally married to life. Otherwise how could you explain the bitter struggle for existence that goes on in the Italian villages and countryside where every speck of earth is utilized to grow the vine? High up—on apparently inaccessible mountain ledges, the peasant and his woman clamber with a heavy load of sticks to

make the frames for their vine. It is the devil's own toil and makes the women prematurely old. That is life, and the Italian clings to it with an astonishing tenacity. A man is not a coward because he loves life. It merely means that he will be careful. He has fought too many wars in the past for Church and petty State; too often has he bled in vendettas and duels. He has grown to appreciate life and to hold on to it.

Hence, Italians do not like operations. Nobody, you may say, likes them? There are people who are amazingly indifferent; who bear pain like Red Indian braves. It's all a matter of temperament.

Your honest Italian is generally terrified of operations and has a healthy dislike for surgeons. He will consult a surgeon in an extremity and in despair. Do what you like, he seems to say, I know all about you and your precious surgery, but it is either you or death, and I haven't yet decided which is the greater evil—but I'll try you or at least, I'll hear what you have to say.

Of course, this is only the undercurrent. On the face of things, that is on his face, there are smiles. He wants to show you how indifferent he is to you and all your works. He even shakes you by the hand cordially. After all, he owes that to you as a human being. You reciprocate but say nothing. One word other than that of greeting will send him scuttling away from you certain as hell is hell that you were going to cut him up right there and then.

You say nothing. You look at him innocently and pretend that you are a victim of the same sort of trouble as himself, but you say nothing. You pretend with your face and hands. You shrug your shoulders.

He then asks you how your health has been these last few weeks. 'Fine,' you say, 'fine.' He has apparently heard about you. They say you are a fine gentleman. Not a word about your being a pretty good surgeon as a sideline. Not a word. Have I been in Italy recently? Yes, I have, and it's a wonderful place. He hasn't been for some ten years. He asks eagerly and you pretend you have visited all the spots that he knew, but when he gets to names you say the names are changed, but otherwise everybody is fine.

When finally you get round to the subject of illness, he will talk about other people's illness first. He might even ask you about your own ills. Symptoms such and such, he says. They are, exactly like that, you say. By this means you might find out whether he is trying to check up on his own illness by questioning you on your own. You let him talk.

There is nothing wrong with his lungs, he explains. Has the finest pair of lungs in Italy, perhaps the world. He doesn't mind boasting about his intestines; as for his kidneys, why they work like clockwork, a doctor told him once when he was very young. His heart is a lion's heart. It beats and beats, although at times he gets out of breath, but he's growing old. Nothing the matter with his heart.

It is only by a process of deduction that you discover which organ it is that is causing him trouble. But he wraps up his answers carefully. He doesn't want you to be right at one guess. Why is he paying you if all he has to do is to tell you? Find out for yourself.

He tortures you by showing you his teeth. They look very white and strong. His whole family has white and strong teeth, he informs you. Then, his eyes. He doesn't use spectacles. That's what comes from eating spaghetti. Spaghetti is the cure for bad eyes. And so it goes on.

Should you interfere in his narrative or not be attentive, or even show an unnatural curiosity to find out what is wrong with him, he will immediately suspect that you are after his appendix or want to rinse his stomach.

You are, after all, in his eyes, no more than a fisher or a hunter. You probably enjoy taking pieces out of people's insides and why should he give you such an unnatural joy and pay for it?

Should you immediately pounce on his real or imaginary illness, he will immediately deny it. But if you listen carefully and remember all that he has to say, you find out that he hasn't been able to eat anything for the last two months, and that is an awful deprivation for an Italian.

You say how sorry you are. Your own appetite is excellent. That's all right; he will tell you the rest of the story; but should you say, 'Ah!' in such a way as

to suggest that you have come to a solution or a diagnosis, he will retaliate by saying that his appetite has never been better and he swallows two roasted chickens a day and drinks Chianti by the gallon.

Now that you have an inkling of what his trouble is, you begin to minimize his symptoms. If he says he has been sick after every meal or that his pains have been excruciating, you say, oh, that's nothing; probably over-ate or over-drank. He forgets himself then in the cause of truth and tells you everything. By these tricks you have made your diagnosis in the conventional manner favoured by Italians. You have done a heavy half-hour's work, but it's worth it.

Now comes a more difficult problem. How are you going to suggest an operation? If only his wife were here or some other relative you might talk it over with them and they could break the news gently to your patient; but if you are to tell him straight away, he will go pale and refuse to consider it. He will go home and hawk round his perforated stomach to all the surgeons in London in the hope that one of them will tell him that an operation isn't necessary. So, if you are wise and know a thing or two, you don't mention the word operation.

There are medical treatments, you say, which will put you right. You enumerate a few that come to mind, only to find, of course, that he has already tried them. He knows every sort of clyster; he has taken pills and powders so that his bedside table looks like a lady's dressing-table. He has tried paraffin oil;

bicarbonates and anti-acid preparations. He has tried everything that a Sunday newspaper advertises, but has been disappointed and, what is more dreadful, has been unable to eat.

You know that he has been X-rayed, but you must be certain. Yes, he has. So you have eliminated every conceivable treatment except——

Operation. He supplies the word himself. He supplies it cheerfully as if he has discovered it himself. He doesn't mind being his own judge. But again it is only a trap. You must show no enthusiasm for taking out his stomach. You must rather wear a long face and think for a few moments and say as mournfully as you can, 'There are other methods. We can rinse you again. We can give you some more powders. . . .'

'No, no,' he says. He's tried all that. It is obvious to him that he must be operated upon, but he appreciates how much you dislike the idea of doing it, which he thinks is very humanitarian of you.

You don't tell him that his life depends on it and that if he had come a few months earlier the operation would have been simplicity itself.

Part one is over.

Once the operation is done, the patient treats you like a long-lost brother. He offers you all the tasty dishes that his relatives bring him, fruit and wine. He will kiss your hand in a sort of grand way and symbolically, although he really ought to kiss your brain—which went through agonies trying to solve the conundrum that was his stomach. But you have

done more for him than his own father and mother, although you wonder how you could have done, considering they created him. But words don't matter—the gratitude pours out of his heart. He says he will never forget you, and he means it. He treats you as a confidant and a friend from henceforth and you must attend wedding parties and suffer to have your praises sung to the sky in front of your face. You are in fact the man who saved his life.

And now I was hurrying to my twelve o'clock appointment to say good-bye to my good friends. No wonder one's personal worries were submerged for the moment. What would happen to them should Italy declare war in alliance with Germany?

When I arrived they greeted me affectionately and repeated with unabashed candour that I was the one who had pulled them out of the jaws of death and that even when they went back to Italy they would remember me. I thanked them.

Then we began talking about the war. Would Italy join? Some said yes and others said no—but all hoped that they would never have to raise arms against the country they loved.

They openly disliked the 'Tedeschi'. They were the cause of all the trouble and the Duce was not such a fool as to pull Hitler's chestnuts out of the fire for him. After all, the Duce was careful. We must discount the mobilization—after all it was only dignified that Italy should do what all the other countries were doing. Of course, the Italians wouldn't fight

over Poland. 'How could they fight the French?' asked a Piedmontese in his own peculiar dialect, which is half French and half Italian. Of course, there was no knowing what the 'glory-boys' in Rome would do. The P.N.F.—Partito Nazionale Fascista—was more often than not the Per Necessitadi Famiglia, said one of the Italians with the party badge in his lapel. Ciano had been made a Knight of the Assumption—for his remarkable diplomatic successes. They were full of news and rumours. Nobody believed that at the first blast of the Nazi trumpets the walls of democracy would fall flat. They had lived in England, these Italians, and had tasted liberty—and when they went home they said they would have nothing but the best to say of England and English ways. 'Pity', said one, 'if there is a war —our A.R.P. is very bad in Torina—they will have to evacuate the whole city—and as for gas-masks—why they cost one hundred and fifty lires—more than poor people like us can afford; here, you get them free. The Unione Nazionale Protezione Anti-Aerea sends round post-cards urging us to buy them.' 'Don't let's be depressed,' said another. 'It can't happen....'

Then of course, there was the question of food that worried them. They had letters from home telling of rationing and Mussolini's dictum on bread and the inauguration of meatless days as in Germany. The last Roman Empire fell because it could no longer supply the *panem et circenses*—somebody said good-

humouredly. There were tales, of course, of inefficiency—one said that when the magazines were opened during the last September crisis, the military dress for the reserves was found cut but unassembled! Another said that he had heard that there were German troops on the Italian Riviera (like the proverbial Russians with snow on their boots, I thought), because tons and tons of sauerkraut was being dispatched there, he had heard from an exporter friend of his. Of course many of the Tedeschi were prowling about the Savoy dressed up as tourists with long feathers in their caps. And so it went on—until the time came to say good-bye.

I only hope that the many prayers of my friends, and undoubtedly many other Italians in Italy itself, will pierce the heavy oak doors of the Palazzo Chiggi, where the Italian Man of Destiny sits, for in the last phase—if ever there be one for him—he will remember that it was the people that made Caesar and murdered him.

For good or for bad, the Duce is deeply rooted in the hearts of most Italians. Many may hate him—but all will admit that despite shortcomings he has left a sure and steadfast legacy which will remain in Italy's memory.

A rivederci, my good friends.

V

ONE O'CLOCK: AFTERNOON

*

The farewell party of my Italian friends threatened to develop into an orgy of crying, self-commiseration, and general low spirits, so I was glad to go away from this melancholy scene. My heart was heavy with sadness, and the memories of the last few years seemed to come back with astonishing vividness.

Writing the thoughts that crowded into my head at the moment I was hurrying to my next appointment, at one o'clock, threatens to disclose a part of my intimate life which I have always sedulously guarded from prying eyes—even the sharp eyes of my books, to which so much has been revealed. To uncover everything, to bare my heart, may earn me the accusation of being a sentimentalist. I will dare this; for if any book of mine is to be a true account of my life it would not be complete without this incident, small in itself and everyday perhaps in the world at large, but memorable and dear to me.

Each man, they say, is the architect of his own destiny, and his past is closely interwoven with his future—but he would be an impudent man indeed who laid no store by fate, by the spinning wheel of life and providence which sometimes uses you very much like the ivory ball in a game of roulette—Red or Black—and Number, M'sieur?

For Red or Black—think of an unexpected meeting with a person who might change the whole course of your life; for a Number—think of some casual hour in some forgotten afternoon. So it was with Dorothy.

I had sown my seeds of love, misunderstanding, tears, parting, or what you will in my early days. Women there had been; gay, beautiful, simple, tragic; situations too in which I may have behaved unfairly out of the ignorance of a young heart eager for experience and love. And I was sometimes thwarted and punished, as is the way with the ardent and those that do not learn from their experiences.

There had been one who had pursued me mercilessly, cruelly, with a strange bitterness in her heart —who spoke of love but meant hate. She sought to punish me for her own infidelity, as if I was the cause of her weakness—hating me because I personified trust and love—whereas she had deceived me. She sought to punish herself by punishing me. She was bent on destroying every vestige of happiness in my life. That was her mission and her illusion—and yet

she so nearly succeeded in her contemptible work. I gave her a name in my previous books, but now I prefer her to go nameless—a shadow on the borders of my existence.

What of the other, then? The other woman I was hurrying to meet for my one o'clock appointment—how and why had she come into my life?

Well, it happened this way.

I was invited to a party of 'gratitude'—given in my honour. A wealthy patient of mine had recovered from a serious operation and she felt that she owed me more than just a mere cheque. Let me digress for the moment and say that my patient's husband was an Australian and he and his wife were very good friends of mine.

I had suddenly been called up one night to attend his wife, a charming and beautiful woman who had added something to her husband's position, not only by her beauty but by her intelligence. They were young people. He was thirty-four, but was already a departmental chief in one of the ministries.

On some previous occasion, I had noticed that his wife (Margaret was her name) was not looking very well, but she dismissed my semi-professional inquiry and told me not to 'talk shop'. So when I was called hurriedly to her bedside I had the greatest misgivings. It is strange, but one always thinks that the worst has happened to one's friends. Moreover, there is a peculiar desire once one sees one's friend to beat about the bush and pretend that things aren't as bad

as they look. Generally speaking, they are much worse and you know it.

Examination proved that Margaret was suffering from a very acute appendix, and yet for a few minutes I dithered about and dared not suggest the only possible course of treatment—an immediate operation. Besides being a harsh sentence, there was always the feeling that someone else ought to be called in to confirm the diagnosis. Not that one wasn't sure—acute appendicitis is obvious—but one wished to throw the onus of telling the patient and her husband that an operation was necessary on to other shoulders. I therefore suggested that they should consult someone else. They refused to hear of it.

'Your judgement is final,' they said. 'We trust you.' That sealed and bolted all doors of escape. I said as much. They replied that this was the penalty of friendship. I agreed and still hesitated.

Instead of taking her straight to a nursing home and operating right away, I had X-rays taken. But one look at the ominous dark shadow on the plate sent a shiver down my spine. Idiot that I was—taking the risk of not operating for two days. The plate clearly showed a dilated and dangerous-looking appendix.

When next I spoke I did not minimize the danger. There was no time to be lost considering feelings. I rushed her to a nursing home and within an hour she was ready for the operating theatre. Her husband, meanwhile, paced frantically outside in the corridor,

and was so exhausted at the end of half an hour that the matron decided to put an end to the marathon and gave him a stiff brandy and a sedative. She told me afterwards that he looked far worse than the patient.

Expectations, however, were fulfilled and Margaret made a wonderful recovery. Twelve days later she was already at home, and in another week she was inviting me to the 'gratitude' party.

I arrived, and found that I had to shake hands with about two dozen people, who all averred that if ever they had an appendix to remove they would call me and . . . ; those who had had theirs out promised me broken legs, arms, stomach trouble, and anything else I could find wrong with them, which was awfully decent of them, don't you think—and-what-about-another-glass-of-sherry?

Margaret, however, was very pleased to clink a glass of sherry with me and to say that so few days ago her life had depended on me. She promised that in future she wouldn't even take that risk! And I told her that next time I would treat her like a patient and make no bones about it—but the next time I referred to would be a baby they could expect.

Suddenly, in the middle of the party, I felt someone had come into the room. My back was to the door and I was chatting amiably—but I was certain someone had entered. I turned round and sure enough a crowd had gathered in the centre of the room. In the centre of that crowd was a person, as

yet invisible to me, but a person who—to use a Buddhist phrase—I was sure I had known in my reincarnation days—the days before the before.

All of us have experienced this feeling. We meet someone for the first time and yet we feel we know them; we are old friends really; we even remember or we seem to guess each other's likes and dislikes; our conversation seems linked somewhere to the same past—we know the same places—and sometimes the same friends, or perhaps we imagine we do. Anyway, whatever it is—and I don't believe in calling everything one does not understand a psychic experience—I and that person had 'registered'. I stood looking at her, blissfully oblivious that my hostess was demanding my attention.

'Come and be introduced, George,' she was saying, and yet I stood absolutely still, gazing in rapt absorption at the person to whom I was to be introduced. A peculiar feeling of shyness mingled with some childish awe came into my heart again after many, many years. I felt like a schoolboy who is suddenly confronted by his inamorata at a party where he did not expect to meet her.

We met. I heard her first name and she heard mine. We smiled. I must have bowed slightly, and she probably must have smiled even more graciously, and then a tide of people came and took her away. They chattered and laughed around her and left me standing in a little oasis with some elderly ladies who were asking for 'thrilling' experiences and begging

me to send them copies of *The Healing Knife*. I was all inattention. I said words but forgot what I said immediately I finished speaking—I was gazing, gazing at the person to whom I had just been introduced.

She was probably completely unconscious of my existence, I was thinking. Now and again our eyes met. Hers had that pleasant 'cocktail-look' and I tried not to look so ridiculously earnest. After all, this wasn't the first time I had looked at a pretty girl—even at a very pretty girl, but—somehow the inevitable word comes to mind—she was different.

She had charm, poise, beauty. She had a musical voice. She was Helen, Aphrodite—in fact, I had fallen in love at first sight, a ridiculous predicament which the knowledgeable will say is impossible!

I spoke to her later on in that memorable afternoon. She told me that she had just returned from her first solo flight somewhere in the country. Hope sprang up in my breast of seeing her again. My own passionate hobby, I said, was flying. I told her how I used to fly from a town in the north to London, piloting the plane myself, in the days when I tried to run a consulting surgery both there and in London. We laughed over the fears that people had of flying. But to us, we agreed, it was the spice of life. To wing miles up—away from civilization with the happy freedom of gods; to feel the wind lashing over the side of the cockpit and the thrill of speed—and the ever-present sense of danger—was something that we both loved.

Our conversation was interrupted by the arrival of guests and Dorothy had to leave me and be introduced to the newcomers. I relapsed to amusing the elderly ladies who were still clamouring for a tale.

Whatever tale I told them, I must have told it badly, for my eyes seemed helplessly entangled in the vision of the girl who moved with such grace and spoke with a wisdom beyond her years.

For a moment perhaps my eyes returned to me, returned to look at my questioners, and when I looked for her again I could not find her. With embarrassed candour I asked my hostess where 'that attractive girl' had got to. She had gone home. So soon? Yes, so soon. Did you like her? Very much. Well, you must meet her again.

And I did meet her again. And again. She seemed to go to all the parties I was invited to. I carefully went to every party, and there she was. We talked, we discussed. I tried hard to be charming. I wanted to see her again and again, but I was frightened. Lightly, very lightly has the rose of love to be plucked lest the butterfly be frightened and fly away —so goes an old Persian proverb, and I was careful to observe it.

And now it was one o'clock and I was going to meet her. Five months had passed. Many things had happened during those five months. War had been declared and I had proposed. Both were circumstances of great meaning to me; both factors would

determine my future life. And now I was going to hear whether I was accepted or not.

My presentiment told me that I should be accepted. This was no vanity on my part. It was that peculiar reading into the future which has served me so well in the past. My friends have often advised me to put it to some good purpose and take up horse-racing—but I am certain the Fates would not stand such commercialization.

I thought over in my mind all the difficulties, all the conundrums, the misunderstandings, the traditions that invariably beset a course such as I was taking.

In the first place, I was a foreigner and Dorothy was an Englishwoman—although I suppose in different circumstances she would have been the foreigner and I the native. But I knew only too well the prejudice there was against foreigners—a prejudice which many foreigners, I regret to say, have earned in full measure. Customs and habits are different; and yet—I thought that I who had lived a cosmopolitan existence was capable of adjusting myself to new conditions easily. Marriage, however, was a serious step—and we had to consider all its 'pitfalls'—so as I walked to the appointment I began considering them.

Never before had I wished more devotedly for the happiness of a person than I did then. Never before had I been willing to make every sacrifice to achieve it. There are moments when all thoughts of oneself

disappear, and the aggregate of those moments is, I believe, called love.

I said that I was sure of being accepted? Yes, I was sure, but I had trepidations, premonitions, what you will, that all would not be as easy as it looked, but I felt strong to fight whatever came, and when I entered the room where she was standing and bent my head waiting for the answer, I felt a sudden pang of fear. What would she say? What if she said no? What would I do? What do people do? Do they shake hands and say something fatuous about being friends? And what of the person that loves—they say one always loves more than the other—what does he or she do? Does one pronounce the cry in one's heart or does one stifle it for evermore?

But she said yes. A very soft, low 'yes'—but it was unmistakable. I seated her in an arm-chair and excused myself. Once out of the door I ran like a madman to my bank. Here was deposited a ring—an heirloom that had been given by the grand-duchess Olga to a cousin of mine on her wedding-day. She herself was killed together with her husband during one of the Russian revolutions and the ring miraculously passed on to my mother—and then on to me. However, this was to be the engagement ring; something that I had kept secretly even during the days of struggle and starvation in Paris—and now it was to see the light of day and be worn by the one I loved.

Memory has taken a toll of many things. Friends and loves have lingered in the dim unfathomable

past and disappeared without regret, but the memory of this hour will ever remain.

I rushed back frantically, tearing doors open and flinging them wide, the ring tightly clasped in my left hand.

'Darling,' I said, 'here is the ring.' She stretched out her hand. It did not fit.

We laughed. After all it was not made for her. We could have it changed. But in my heart there was a presentiment. Would we marry?

VI

TWO O'CLOCK: AFTERNOON

*

My excitement was so great and the expected came so unexpectedly suddenly that my first reaction was to determine whether I should feel joyously happy or dismally sad. I had good grounds for either, I argued, and being a Russian I chose sadness—for with us sadness is synonymous with happiness. Ah, the sadness of a Russian—it has to be seen to be believed. It is something so light, so much on the verge of tears and laughter, very much like our music, filled with a mad gaiety which endeavours to hide our tears. It's probably very adolescent, but there you are.

And yet for a moment I lost consciousness of my nationality. I wanted above everything else to be an Englishman. I thought: how would an Englishman receive the news of his acceptance? I mean, your traditional Englishman, your Continentally conceived Englishman? Would he stroke a pensive moustache and whisper tenderly, 'The weather has im-

proved, although there has been some snow in Scotland.'

And yet there was this sadness, the sadness of the 'ugly duckling' created with beautiful pathos by Hans Andersen. Was I returning to my childhood days in order to answer a problem which confronted me as a man? You see, in no imaginable way can I be said to resemble the traditional Englishman. My accent is far indeed from being Oxford or Cambridge. When I speak my vowels and consonants are very soft (a Russian speaks English sounds like an Italian gone hoarse, someone once told me!). And yet at that moment I ardently desired to be 'an Englishman'. I wanted a calm assurance; a correct politeness (not overdone); and the rugged aroma of heather around me.

Would I, I asked myself, be accepted 'as one of them'? It is nice to merge in society, and look like all the other pebbles on the beach, now and again. Would I be accepted as an Englishman—or only as a synthetic product of His Majesty's Naturalization Act of 1911? Then I glanced down at my royal blue armlet with the letters E.M.S.—and said aloud, 'I am accepted—otherwise would I have been given a Government job? Would I have been trusted to look after air-raid casualties (pray heaven they do not come) and the war-wounded?' My origin in the distant Caucasian plains did not hinder that. My superiors trusted me. It was a warm, pleasant feeling, this loyalty, this consciousness of belonging to

the Commonwealth of Nations. *Civis Romanus sum.* A citizen am I of a greater and nobler Rome. . . .

And so it was these thoughts which banished any fears I had that my fiancée might make a distinction between an Englishman by birth and one by adoption. She would not, I was sure, cast humiliating glances if I betrayed my origin by speech or gesture; nor would she mumble in her sleep the fact that I had forgotten to put my striped trousers on at some important reception.

No, there was no reason to be sad. Even the delicious and delicate Russian sadness was quite out of place at two o'clock on that eventful day.

My housekeeper had not prepared lunch for me. I'm rather erratic about meals and owe myself severe reprimands for the countless occasions when I have announced a desire for a meal without giving due warning. I had forgotten this all-important ritual and had said I would lunch out, when suddenly I decided that lunching in was preferable to going around with my stupid smiling face in the company of strangers. I wanted to keep my face at home where I could wear the broadest of grins without causing any offence. There was also the question of superstition. They say it is a happy augury to begin a new life by eating in one's own home with one's fiancée.

Whilst the lunch was being cooked I and my wife-to-be sat in the drawing-room and talked. To be more precise I did all the talking this time. It was not a case of listening to one's voice for the sheer pleasure

of hearing it. I had an urgent need to talk about a subject very near and dear to me—myself. I relived my past in words.

On no other occasion, I said, had a girl accepted a ring from me. The present situation was a new one for me. And, of course, I loved her far more than any other man did—although, in terms of degree and space, love must have been the same for everybody. After all love is such a complete thing and even if one loves one or two, or even three, people in one's life, it is very difficult to know or to pretend that you love your future wife more than your fellow men do theirs —otherwise how can you give the name of love to any occasion if you think that it is transient and will pass away? No. Love comes and it goes, but it is always love with everybody. What I did with it, however, was quite another matter. And that was exactly what I wanted to talk about to my fiancée.

I was happy, I told her. She would become the fabric of every dream I built, and I hoped she also would love me. But happiness must last long. We must not build our house on sand, because if the sand were treacherous the house would topple down and crush us. My fiancée arrested the metaphor and I explained more clearly.

'If I did not have the courage to tell you the whole of my past,' I said. A past no better and no worse than that of any young man, but it was a past nevertheless and I should not hide anything.

Dorothy was very young and very inexperienced

and I did not wish to frighten her. I myself was afraid that she would ask for explanations—explanations that I should be unable to give and satisfy her innocence. But if I said nothing, my reward would be to pay the full sum of cowardice. Dearly would I pay for every trifling escapade, for when she learnt of them from other mouths she would be unable to reconcile them with her trust in me.

Therefore I told Dorothy that I thought it was wrong and stupid to conceal anything from the people you love. Everything is better told—and if love is not deep enough it will not understand; if it is, it will forgive—if it is forgiveness that a woman feels when she knows a man's past; although what the past has to do with her, I have never been able to understand. However, I have come to the conclusion that it is better to sow all the fears in the world by telling the truth, than to hide anything. After all, I argue, fears may be dissipated by subsequent behaviour, whereas not to tell everything may be thought a deception. And life has taught me this much: never deceive a woman—especially the woman you intend to marry. If you deceive her before—or, for that matter, after—you are married, and even if she finds it in her heart to forgive you, nevertheless by deceiving her you will lay a marsh for the foundations of the life you intend leading with her. Hence the number of vicious circles in married life. Hence I was determined not to become the helpless slave of vicious circles. Hence I told the truth. Hence I am

open to judgement. I leave it to subsequent events to prove me a fool. But I think I did the wise thing.

There was little need for me to enumerate my sins and my weaknesses to my fiancée. She had already read them in my previous confessions. She was merciful enough not to consider me an ogre. Whatever else I told her was for her ears and hers alone, and nothing would be gained by repeating it. And that being the very last confession I could envisage or indeed bear, I can only say that I told her everything, every flirtation of mine, every acquaintance. I remembered all the daughters of Eve for her sake. There were to be no 'surprises' in the future, nor would people pretending to be her friends be able to spring up with accusing fingers held high and indict me for long-forgotten indiscretions, or fabricate new ones. Nor would there be any offended maiden who would arise like a ghost out of the past and maintain that I had ruined her young life. Men, women, ghosts, all these things my Dorothy was told. Come what may, said I, truth will prevail.

After the recital was over, I again proposed. I did it for the joy of the thing and because I thought perhaps my story might have disturbed her and she might ask for some hours, or weeks, or months—or perhaps years in which to reflect. However, she said 'Yes', and I said 'Come to lunch.'

Queerly enough, there has always been a curious belief that people in love are never hungry—they are supposed to derive their sustenance from such im-

material things as stars, roses, and dreams; but with me love worked contrariwise. I got an appetite that Henry the Eighth might envy (otherwise there is no connection temperamentally or amorally between that gentleman and myself).

My housekeeper prepares most tasteful dishes; were I an emperor I would reward her with a jewel for every culinary delight that she prepares for me. She has a way of making me hungry, and combined with that was the feeling of elation at being in love, so I prepared to eat the chicken *à la casserole* with special relish.

A word about eating chickens. When eating dishes *volaille* such as game or chicken, my manners, I regret to say, go by the board. I offer no excuses, although I could say that two years as a waiter and a wanderer over the globe was not the best school for manners, especially as I was a waiter in some very second-class French restaurants. Here the patrons treated chickens with scant ceremony and knew how to pull every juicy tendon off the bones. Their plates invariably looked like ancient graveyards after they had finished. So it was that I too used my fingers and dispensed with knives and forks when eating a fowl. I exercised great restraint, however, and did not hurl the hapless bird's thigh-bones over my shoulder; nor for that matter did I squirt the juices into my fellow diners' ears and eyes.

I must, nevertheless, relate that this chicken was the cause of extreme embarrassment to me. Its ridi

culously trussed up legs and fried skin caused me intense grief. It happened thus.

We entered the dining-room. However tempted I was to shock my fiancée with my chicken-manners, I suddenly realized that there would be no opportunity for me to splash sauce into her beautiful eyes, because it was a Friday—and being good Christian souls, there was no chance for me to exercise my atavistic inclinations. So I walked into the dining-room and sat down on my usual seat near the fire, knowing full well that I would behave most correctly at a fish-luncheon. The worst that could happen would be that I would extract the fish-bones from my mouth with my fingers, which is allowed, I believe, in the most distinguished circles. Then lo and behold—to my surprise and mortal terror, the housekeeper brings in a whole roasted spring-chicken and sets it down in front of us.

It was no fault of my housekeeper. She had forgotten, in her excitement at having to prepare a meal at a moment's notice, that the day was Friday, and in her hurry on her shopping expedition she bought the first juicy bird she saw and flung it into the oven. The situation was amusing. We smiled. Here we were on the threshold of a new life, a new life full of happy promise and hope, and the first thing that we were going to do was to commit a venial sin and eat a chicken on a Friday. We decided to leave it to our father confessor to decide whether in such circumstances we were not permitted an indulgence. Cala-

mity or not, Dorothy, my fiancée, decided that heaven would be kind to two sinners who were hungry and before whom stood such an appetizing dish. Purgatory would deal gently with us, we said. In the meantime my stomach was exulting at the sight (my eyes were registering all the delights for my stomach) of the chicken.

In the end we did not eat the chicken. Think what you like, we decided that we would begin our lives by obeying the injunctions of our mother the Church. We compromised with a mushroom omelette. The housekeeper enjoyed her roasted chicken. And now does anyone say that I am in need of a confession because I suggested to a mortal soul that she should enjoy the chicken?

Now this chicken did not leave my conscience. Its aroma of sin and roast filled my imagination. I appealed to the Mother Superior of one of the hospitals to which I am attached. She smiled at the episode. Was I forgiven? I asked. Of course I was. I would have been had I and my fiancée eaten the chicken. The Church, it appears, had granted indulgence and allowed people to eat meat on Fridays for the duration of the war. What a frightful situation! A whole war had been conveniently staged for me to enjoy chickens on Fridays and I had not known it! I decided to have my revenge on that chicken. So when I returned home that evening I asked my housekeeper for the rest of the chicken and I was glad to hear that she had not eaten it all. So I polished it right off in

gross fashion, and it no longer haunted my conscience.

But to drop this wretched chicken and return to my engagement.

During our lunch of mushroom omelette we talked of our future and we made plans. We decided not to wait any longer than was necessary, and we decided on a quiet wedding somewhere in the country—and then we began planning where we would live, the things we would like to have in our flat, the people we would invite to our reception. There were so many pleasant things to talk about and we felt radiantly happy—so happy, in fact, that I was beginning to get frightened. The old wives in Russia always used to warn people who were too happy that unhappiness was just around the corner. The Chinese always propitiate the evil spirits in moments of their greatest joy—otherwise they fear that they will make their fiercest onslaught just when they are most unprepared. And I suppose I must have felt this strange inexplicable feeling.

For a moment we had forgotten in our happiness that our destiny, which we imagined lay in our own hands, was in fact in the strong and powerful grip of world events. One tilt of the scales of war, and our fortune and happiness would come tumbling down. A bomb, a splinter, diseases—all these things might carry us away from each other. The cannons were roaring on the Western Front, and Adolf Hitler, the modern Nero, was prepared to fiddle his macabre

tune while the whole Reich was burning behind him. We were sure that our country would achieve the final victory—but we knew that it would be at great cost of human happiness and lives. We remembered then those who were in direct danger, and we offered up a silent prayer for their safe-keeping. . . .

Would we survive this war? We, the young, the loving? And when the war was over, would our old world still be the same? Would our streets be the same, our habits, our religion, and our political system? Or were we approaching the whirlwind from which there is no escape? Come what may, we had a quiet assurance in ourselves that we would do what was right, and that we would love each other and comfort each other in whatever dark days there might be ahead, so that we in our turn might serve the needs and demands of our country better.

We parted with a smile. Life was still with us and it was good to be alive. It was good to hope and to plan and to have aspirations. It was good to be in love.

VII

THREE O'CLOCK: AFTERNOON

*

One of my weaknesses, peculiarities, or whatever, is the desire to be charitable whenever an event of magnitude befalls me. This is an excellent Christian precept and is enjoined upon all good souls, but as far as I am concerned it is not the humanitarian or religious considerations which prompt me to sudden charity.

Thus I have never saved a few pounds to send to some society or other; nor have I subscribed to any good cause. The appeals of Cats' and Dogs' Homes leave me utterly cold. The inhumanity of the wars in Abyssinia, Spain, the invasions of Austria and Czechoslovakia shock me, but I do not dip my hand into my pocket. I refuse to pay conscience money. I would rather spend my last penny to prevent a war or an invasion than support its victims. I leave them to the tender mercies of the humanity that has betrayed them. In the meantime I believe that it is not

money, but deeds to restore them, that count. However, I was saying that my charity is always sudden.

I don't like the word 'charity', because it blesses the giver and to whom it is given. Precisely for that reason I don't like it. I think that such ostentatious charity is not charity at all, but snobbishness. People who have money, and who delight in sending cheques so as to appear on a list of donors, are snobs. And I have no patience with them.

I think that charity should be a spontaneous thing. It should be the realization of a man who has more than his needs that there are people without so much as a part of their needs. That I believe is the real Christian charity which was preached by the medieval Church.

I am, for instance, amused by the generosity of millionaires. The generosity becomes an institution, say a library, or a home for retired nurses. Very fine too. But what astonishes me is that we should think that they are generous. I believe the generous are those who give of their lack and not of their plenty. I think the real meaning of charity is sacrifice. Now what sort of sacrifice is it for a man who has made twenty million pounds to give away a million? Or for that matter, if he gives away nineteen millions? He still has a pretty solid million, and I guess that a man's needs can be satisfied amply with a paltry million. Then, I'm also amused by the thought that the millionaire has after all made that money out of the public. He has persuaded them into buying his

branded toothpaste, or whatever it is; he has persuaded millions and millions of people into buying his wares. As a result he makes a tidy sum. All honour to him, but what puzzles me is that he should want to return some of that money to the public. Why bother to gather it up, I say, if you are going to give half of it back? Why not cut the price of your article and give the benefit to the public like that, and bring this wonderful toothpaste of yours within the reach of a few more millions? No, he prefers to gather up all this money—and gathering up money is expensive. So he spends some money to gather up money—I mean, he has to pay clerks, accountants, cashiers, etc., to gather up all this money—and then he goes and gives it all back to the public; libraries, swimming-pools, and so forth. He doesn't even consult the public to whom he is returning his millions. He just says that they want a library, and they accept it and thank him very much. For all he knew they would much rather have had their toothpaste a little cheaper and all the other products he controls, so that they could buy more hats, or go to more pictures, or afford more correspondence courses, or some other thing. But he just builds them a library and that is that. Take it or leave it, and they take it, and the mayor says what a public-spirited man the millionaire is, although it is really the public that is public-spirited for accepting so many libraries from millionaires. Just supposing that they didn't. Supposing they were to say that they didn't want any

more libraries or swimming-pools or research colleges. Suppose they said that it was the job of the government which taxes them to provide these things, what would the poor millionaires do with all their money?

They could build themselves libraries or put platinum into their teeth or make bathrooms of lapis lazuli or build magnificent buildings for their offices so as to eat up the taxation they would have to pay, or they could give higher wages to their workmen, their accountants, and typists. They could do all these things and the world perhaps would be a much better place with higher wages and not so many libraries given by millionaires, but then there wouldn't be any millionaires and millionaires' charity would disappear. Which would be sad.

An enterprising young man will one day open a bureau for millionaires who don't know what to do with their millions. Life must be simply terrible for them. Everything they do turns to money. They can't buy up a small business without it suddenly growing into a prosperous concern and making millions for them. They are simply haunted by the fact that they can't make a business failure for the simple reason that they are so rich that it doesn't matter how many failures they make—they are still millionaires. All that happens if a millionaire loses a lot of money is that he cuts down the wages of his workers and apologizes to the public profusely for not being able to build them a library 'this year'.

However, it's about my charity that I set out to write.

As I said, I don't give charity because I want my sins forgiven; my social conscience is clear. I give it because I want to and because I recognize need and feel appalled by it. I have tasted the bitters of poverty and have not forgotten.

Now, I'm no Santa Claus and my pocket has to stretch over a number of relatives and dependants, but once in a while I feel very pleased with the world and feel that I ought to celebrate my happiness not with the fortunate and the satiated but with the unhappy and the poor.

I know that my small individual action can do very little to alleviate the hardships of life, but the small pleasure it can bring to someone who unsuspectingly falls a victim to my 'generosity' makes it very well worth while.

On many occasions this spontaneous prompting to go into the highways and byways and call humanity out of the hedges and bring them to a feast has landed me into trouble. On other occasions acts of generosity—such as lending money to friends when I myself was in comparative need of the money—have brought me a great deal of sadness. But it is not of this I want to speak. Here is a recent occurrence.

It was three o'clock and I had accompanied my fiancée to her home. I was free for the afternoon—I had intentionally kept it free hoping that my fiancée

would spend it with me—but she had another important engagement and had to leave me.

So a little after three I found myself strolling down Oxford Street. I was exhilarated. What man wouldn't be on the day that he was accepted? And now this peculiar desire to make someone else happy crept on me. It came by stages and then it seized me. It seized me by the heart and refused to let go. My eyes wandered round for a recipient of my happiness.

I looked anxiously at the crowd of shoppers surging round me. There they were, with their mothers-in-law, their sisters, and their friends—hundreds and hundreds of women who came to shop or gaze at the shops. Should I stop one and suggest that I buy her something? She might have an ailing child who needed some warm clothes—another might have a husband in hospital. Many of the shoppers looked prosperous; was that only a show? Perhaps they were reduced to a few shillings? These were not all guesses. Being a surgeon in hospital teaches one not to go by appearances alone.

And I wasn't sure which way my 'charity' should express itself. I had a few pounds in my pocket. What would happen if I came across someone with some ghastly tragedy in their lives—something that only a largish sum of money could cure—what would I do then; take them home or to my bank or what? I've lent fifty pounds on 'hard-luck' stories before and I never had it returned; I've lent more than that—and been called a miser because I asked to have it back

after waiting for over a year for the money—I have learnt to mistrust my impulses, and besides I was getting married and would need all the money I had to settle down to married life.

But this mood was not susceptible to reason. I had to do something for somebody else because so much had been done for me. I had to show some gratitude. 'He rejoiceth not in the slaughter of animals and sacrifices,' I said. I won't send ten pounds to a church organ fund, I'd sooner give it to help someone who needs food rather than church music for the moment. One thing at a time.

Suddenly I found myself gazing at a young girl. She looked anything between the indeterminate twenty and twenty-three. She was drably dressed. Ah, she was Cinderella and I was the fairy godmother. I gazed and gazed at her, not having enough courage to speak, but my look was very intense.

'Whajer lookin' at?' she asked me, striding over to where I stood on the pavement.

'Nothing,' I said. 'Or rather, I was looking at your shoes.'

'What's wrong wiv 'em?'

I said in a rather sheepish voice that perhaps she needed some new shoes.

''Corse I need some new shoes,' she said ironically. 'So would you, mister, if you'd done as much walking as I have after a job.'

I agreed that I would. I said I was sorry and that all I wanted to do was to buy her a pair of shoes.

'Go on,' she replied. 'What's bitten you?' I said nothing had bitten me. I was feeling happy and I wanted to buy her a pair of shoes.

'Just because you're feeling happy?' she asked incredulously. 'Precisely,' I said. 'Garn away,' she replied. 'Garn away. Whajer take me for? I'm not one of those——'

And with those words she shuffled away. I watched her, slightly bewildered. It took some time before it dawned on me that she thought I had 'approached' her.

Anyway, there she was going away from me—away from a new pair of shoes and I felt a coward because I did not pursue her and tell her that all I wanted was to get her a pair of shoes. That sounded so damn silly. She would probably have called a policeman. What magistrate would believe that I had gone out that afternoon and met a girl and offered her a pair of shoes just because I was happy?

On the other hand the young virgin might have been a millionairess in disguise seeing how the 'other half lives' before she contributed to the inevitable library.

After a longish walk I found myself in Bond Street. Here too were crowds. Men, women, and children all scurrying, all intent and having great purposes. I alone was purposeless. I was still happy and still bent on discovering somebody I could make happy.

Bond Street is the last place in the world to choose to make anyone happy if you do not want to be mis-

understood. But I was. My inquiry was met with a blank stare. A worn out and very faded lady of about thirty-five who seemed to be dropping off the pavement but never exactly falling, caught my attention.

She might, for all I know, have been drunk. Anyway she turned round and yelled at the top of her voice. 'Shoes? Shoes? What do I want shoes for?' Then she screamed. I disappeared as fast as I could into the stream of humanity and the young-elderly woman laughed like an imbecile at my suggestion.

I was sick of the female sex. Tired of their stupidity. I would find a man, one honest down-and-out man who would appreciate the shoes and not mistake my intentions.

It took some more wandering about before I finally secured my victim. He was sitting near the railings which surround Hyde Park. His cap was fixed firmly over his eyes. He was dirty and asleep.

'Say,' I said, 'would you like a pair of shoes?'

He looked up with the hat still over his eyes. 'Boots,' he said.

'Boots then,' I amended. 'How about some boots?'

'Fine,' he replied.

Off we went to a large shoe shop that stood in Oxford Street.

'Why don't you take the cap off your eyes?' I asked. I had to lead him across the street.

'What have I got to see?" he asked. 'I've spent my time looking at people's faces and I'm tired of them. I hate the whole bloody lot. You included, you

potty philanthropist. What have you done to make me deserve a pair of boots?'

'Nothing,' I replied. 'I'm getting married. And I'm happy and you need a pair of boots and I've got the money to buy some for you and that's all.'

'Huh! Mad—mad as a hatter. I was the same. I was a rich man in my time. I remember. . . .'

A long story poured out of my new friend's mouth. He was a professional beggar, but thought he would deceive me. He told me lies: I retaliated by telling him better ones, but at last we got inside the shop and had him fitted into a pair of stout boots. He still refused to pull the cap off his eyes. He even forgot to say thank you. He merely tapped his head with his forefinger and walked out in his brand-new boots with his torn old shoes wrapped up in an elegant parcel and hanging from his arm with the rest of his worldly possessions.

The salesman stared at me. The cashier giggled. I laughed, and walked out of the store feeling very pleased with myself. The old beggar was hopping along as fast as his legs could carry him—back to his perch near the railings.

Despite my long afternoon walk, I decided to cover the distance to Harley Street by foot. I had another half-hour before meeting my fiancée for tea—so I decided to stroll back in my tracks and cut up to the Street by the back alleys.

Ha—I thought to myself—you precious charity dispenser; how does it feel now that you've done

your deed? Fine, I replied to myself. Simply marvellous.

It was the same sort of feeling that I had felt many, many years ago in Russia. I was six at the time and my family being well off, they used to celebrate Christmas and Easter by giving a party to the children of the village and distributing among them any old things that my two brothers and I had. Old books and toys, besides hampers of food, were given to the poor so they could pray to God for our righteous souls.

Anyway, this dress-giving-away party fascinated me. I remember the sweet gratitude that would follow the distribution of these goods. I liked this sweet gratitude and decided to have some for myself, so one afternoon, regardless of whether it was a saint's day or not, I went into my room and gathered up all my best clothes and those of my brothers and carried the bundle down to the village. Here I generously distributed them round and received my meed of sweet gratitude. So well had I ransacked the trunks and the cupboards that I had managed to collect all my clothes—underwear included. I was left with nothing more than what I had on, but this did not worry a child of six overmuch. I said nothing of my noble deed to my mother—although I felt distinctly proud of having done something magnanimous.

A day or two went by and my generosity was not noticed at home. Indeed, it was some three or four days before the calamity was discovered. This I

firmly believed would never have happened had one of the lads to whom I had distributed the clothes not been the son of the local Jewish pawnbroker, who, when he saw his son with a suit of good quality and cut, decided to sell it. He hung it up in a prominent position in his shop window, where it was spied by chance by one of our footmen, who I suppose recognized the suit as being mine. He rushed off home and reported the story.

Naturally everyone supposed that it had been stolen, and when they found all the trunks and cupboards bare they presumed that thieves had raided the house—although why they should have taken only children's clothes they could not understand.

However, my father decided to deal very severely with the pawnbroker, and he went there and created a first-class scene. The wretched man swore by Moses and Isaac that he hadn't stolen the clothes and it was little Benjamin who had secured the suit. Little Benjamin was questioned but refused to give away my identity—I suppose in the vain hope that he would be allowed to retain my suit. Neither the prayers nor the lamentations of his father would prevail on him to say where he got the suit, but my father wasn't satisfied and he threatened to take the pawnbroker and his little Benjamin to court unless they found a very good excuse for hanging my suit in their shop window.

I realized that I had gone too far, especially as little Benjamin was brought face to face with me.

His large dark eyes were full of terror, but he refused to betray me. I then decided that it was time that I made known my generous action. I was certain of approbation and—who knew—perhaps even of reward?

To my pained surprise I received a severe hiding from my father. That was the reward I got for my first act of pure charity!

VIII

FOUR O'CLOCK: AFTERNOON

*

At four I was due for tea with Dorothy's parents, or relatives rather. Her father was away in America. Her mother I had met on a number of occasions and had admired her charm and wide knowledge, but this was the first time I was going to meet her in circumstances other than purely social. I would be subjected, I was sure, to a great deal of preliminary interrogation, as would be only natural, and although I was feeling very lively after my charity-bout, I had a sense of nervousness. I wanted to please. I wanted to please because I had seen from the very first acquaintance with this extraordinary woman that her standards were high and that her judgements were final.

The atmosphere of the tea-party was most cordial. There was present, besides my fiancée and her mother, her elder sister, a cultured and beautiful girl of twenty-four. All three put me instantly at ease—and before long we were all in animated conversation.

After the tea was over and I was on my way home I began to speculate on Women. Such a speculation provided a cheerful relief to the impenetrable gloom of the misty blackout. The black night seemed to have got into my eyes and I saw a phantasmal procession of the women of many nationalities whom I had known and knew. They flitted through my brain like butterflies, some rather more heavily than others, of every colour and temperament and of every nation. Here is an Englishwoman with quiet and assured grace, bred to sport; a Frenchwoman, agile, vital in every part of her body; a languid Italian with large soft eyes; then an Andalusian with blue eyes and fair hair; a Russian as light as a bubble—probably doing ballet-dancing as she walks—and feminine.... Suddenly I see them all grow old, and I say to myself, to which of all these beauties does Paris give his golden apple? Undoubtedly to our Englishwoman.

Let us take the Russian woman first. I know her best. What do we see? We see a slight figure beautifully proportioned—perhaps years in the Terem (the Russian harem, abolished only in Catherine the Great's time) have given her this grace. Her ancestors did nothing except loll about in overwarmed rooms, playing with dwarfs and listening to lovers. That may be exaggeration, but life in the Terem was a useless sort of existence and merely bred laziness, tantrums, and nostalgia, and the Russian women whom I knew of the last generation before the Revo-

lution certainly had all the traits of their great-grandmothers. In case you should think the Terem very backward and degenerate—as undoubtedly it was—let me remind you that here in England you were 'selling' wives in the market-place less than a century ago! However, not all Russians are nostalgic. The women have beautiful, sonorous voices which they use to advantage. The very lilt of the voice convinces you that they are constantly in love with you. Ah, the slave element is ever there and perhaps that is why they over-accentuate their femininity. No other woman can bait a trap more cunningly, no other woman knows how to use tears to better advantage. When given the opportunity to study they become intellectually mature and are capable of literary and musical appreciation. They are proud and wield their beauty with devastating effect by refusing rather than giving; but when they give they give utterly, when they love they love completely. Read their names: Eléna, Marusia, Vassia, Katia, Turia, Natasha, Sonia—the vowels combine with dreams and die away in a whisper. . . .

But age comes and strikes a peculiar discord with their fading charms. They grow less feminine after forty. They become pals. They develop interests other than their husbands. They don't mind discussing their husband's escapades with other women. In fact, they advise the husband or reprove him. After that they either decide to shoot themselves because they are not jealous, or to spend their last days in a

nunnery. They invariably do neither, but become devoted and misunderstood mothers. They are a wonderful tonic for persons with strong nerves.

So much then for the Russian woman. She can be dismissed, but not without a word or two on the geography of that immense continent known as Russia. I might have used a word like fauna in attempting to describe the various types of womanhood to be found, but that would hardly be in taste. One thing, however, must be emphasized and that is that the northern Slav is racially and facially completely different from her southern sister. The difference may be explained by drawing an analogy between a Scandinavian and an Italian.

The Caucasian beauty, especially of the Circassian variety, is famous throughout the whole world. The Sultans of Turkey had more Circassian blood in their veins than any other. The Moors of Spain took wives from the Caucasian highlands. Theirs is a rare beauty. They have been called in Persian poetry 'the gazelles of the gods', so delicate and fine are their movements and their features. They are slaves incarnate—although many an ambitious maiden of Circassia governed the policies of the Near East when Turkey was an imperial Power. 'There is wine in your eyes,' a poet from Georgia sang, 'and they make me drunk. . . .' But they grow old, and their fine features become sharp and pointed and their wonderful breasts wither.

'Woman, thy charm is being feminine' applies

particularly to Italian women. They are as delicate as blossoms sometimes, and as heavy as haystacks at other times, but feminine they all are. I have seen peasant women of twenty-five looking like grandmothers of sixty, but it did not alter their femininity. And it is from this femininity that their great maternal instincts spring. They are surely the world's fondest mothers—so much so that they exhaust their children because they attempt to mother them right up to the moment these children become mothers or fathers themselves; but an Italian mother's love is as beautiful as it is demonstrative. I have seen them kissing their babies in all the sacred spots in restaurants and railway carriages, happy and oblivious of strangers. Is it a wonder that Leonardo da Vinci, Titian, and Raphael were able to give the world such Madonnas?

After twenty the hot sun of Italy seems to fill her out. At first she is attractively plump. Her soft shoulders look graceful in crinolines, but soon even these outlines expand and she becomes merely fat, jovial, and kindly.

I think of an Italian woman after thirty-five as a dish of succulent macaroni (they have a salty wit usually, and a biting tongue for their husbands, who are gay dogs long after the midnight of their days), oily and juicy. The older she gets the more oil she needs, and by the time she is forty-five she blends into a variety of macaroni dishes; so much so, in fact, that an Italian once told me that he did not

know whether he was kissing his wife or tasting a large helping of *pasta alla Napolitana.* (I wonder what my Italian friends will say when I visit Italy again?)

Now the German woman is home-made. She is oversized, especially in the extremities. Her corsets must be the size of a large lampshade, and her shoes are more than sevens. This is the Prussian woman. She is quiet; she speaks when she is spoken to. She is a Hausfrau, whether she happens to be sweet sixteen or sixty. The home is her whole occupation. The German husband gets a soft job looking after her. The furniture is soft (cushions made by her hand), the bed is soft (she beats the feather mattresses every day), and she is soft herself (nature made her so). What more can a man want?

The Frenchwoman is, of course, different. She is in fact unique. She hasn't waited for me to compliment her all these years; Flaubert and de Maupassant had abler pens than mine. She is piquant, chic, she is all the French words that are applied to her, and she is the envy of the rest of womankind. She is not necessarily beautiful; indeed, the women of France are not beautiful as a whole. A study of historical portraits in the Louvre will convince you of that. The greatest of them were not by ordinary standards of beauty even pretty, but they have that right mixture of spirit and body and sufficient wit to be peers to Cleopatra and the Queen of Sheba and Widow Dido. A faultless taste produces the simple but exquisite dress of Frenchwomen. They appre-

ciate rare perfumes as no other woman in the world. That is one side of them. They are supposed to be the world's greatest lovers, but they are also fond, if strict, mothers. But when they fade, two things happen. They become fat and extraordinarily vivacious, making up for their lack of physical beauty with a fund of anecdotes, postures, and manners. They can also grow old wistfully.

But of all the women in the world, it is the Englishwoman who can grow old beautifully. She has not the Slavonic charm that blends subtly with the hausfrauishness of the German; she takes no oil from the Italian; there is about her something of the wistful charm of the Frenchwoman—a touch only, because her pride forbids her to reveal her heart's secrets on her face.

I personally think that an Englishwoman looks at her best from eighteen to twenty-five, and then again after fifty.

At eighteen she is generally stupid. Germanic symptoms come to the fore. She is demure and pinkly pretty. There is nothing volcanic about her as there is about the Italian girl. Perhaps as the Italians marry early it causes them to attract men, whereas the Englishwoman usually waits until twenty-two or even twenty-five before she enters into matrimony.

In this inbetween age of eighteen to twenty-two she has what I call a cocktail-party-beauty. She is very unoriginal, and I find it difficult to call a girl by her right name simply because she looks very much

like her neighbour. In this year of grace they are all wearing bandeaux and making their lips very full. They always appear to me to be pouting. They seem always to talk about the same thing and to do the same thing. I suppose this is inevitable because they always seem to meet the same people. Society in fact is one large family. It has its scandals, its disappointments and its judgements like any ordinary family. The girls, generally speaking, are jealous of each other. If they are rich they have a subtle way of showing off; if they are poor they swank more blatantly. Your heiress is usually pretty quiet until she has something to drink, and then she accuses you of wanting to marry her, which she says is disgusting. As she is drunk, or partly so, you push her off on to some unsuspecting young man from Eton who can bore her with cricket scores.

That is how I find most girls of the so-called 'smart set' spend their girlhood. They drink too much and they swear and they get very offended if you happen to write the fact down in a book.

Towards the middle of their spring these cheerful crickets begin to show signs of intelligence, and yield to influence good or bad. They are capable of becoming the most fascinating women in the world—and I am happy to say that quite a number of them succeed. The others disappear from life after a few unsuccessful love affairs and go into the country to keep kennels. (Dogs are better than men?)

After twenty they begin to lose their stereotyped

appearance. They have begun to think, and they become individualists. Those that become individualists have, I have noticed, very good taste in dress and they have a stature which is the envy of their Latin sisters.

When age really comes on them they have none of the vain struggling for youth that French women show. They do not fill their skins with creams nor stretch their skins with massages, nor do they wear youthful clothes in order to cheat age. They submit to it. Slowly they surrender the bright colours which they love and put on autumn tints. When their hair grows white they do not attempt to dye it. Their skins remain fresh and velvety because they do not over-apply cosmetics. Their jewellery is not extravagant in an effort to hide the wrinkles of the neck or wrists.

They do not ape the tricks of Venus. Seduction is over and done with. They meet the autumn of their days calmly, seeking only that which is natural, and it often happens that the natural is also the beautiful. Also they have the art of smiling. Their smiles hold wisdom and sometimes a little sadness, and there is even a tolerant whimsicality about them as they gaze on their daughters, who, like themselves, go through the cocktail-party stage and who paint their lips very full.

They are serene as old ruins—well, perhaps that isn't an apt metaphor, but there it is; old ruins, I think, have a serenity which I find very like that of

the ladies I am describing. They are aloof, standing as it were far from the sweets of youth, untempted by modernity, wearing the clothes that suit them, and speaking the language of a time when leisure and culture ruled supreme in the world.

Such then was my fiancée's mother. I have no fear to face in the future if only Dorothy herself grows as beautifully old as her mother; but that is a long time yet—and I might mention that Dorothy is not your cocktail-party sort. There is a wisdom in her which frightens me, but she has the kindness and the heart of a child. And the woman that one is to marry, after all, is the most beautiful and the most wonderful woman in the world. Such is my Dorothy.

But I am forgetting. I have a professional appointment at Harley Street at five.

IX

FIVE O'CLOCK: AFTERNOON

*

I was in a great hurry to reach Harley Street. In my excitement over my engagement and the tea-party I had quite forgotten that I had patients to see at half-past four. It was five o'clock precisely when I entered my rooms.

Happily my first patient was not a very serious case. She was a lady of forty-five who had been suffering for many years past from what she called 'indigestion', but what her doctor diagnosed as a chronic appendix. People with chronic appendices are the hardest people in the world to convince of their condition. 'But surely you must be wrong, doctor,' they say, 'I have had this pain for years.' They say this in such a tone that there is no mistaking what they mean. They imply that after all it is their pain, situated in them, and who are you—an intruder and, what is still far worse, a surgeon—to tell them that it is appendicitis? Should you insist gently, they will tell you that an aunt of theirs suffered from

'indigestion' for years and it is probably hereditary.

I have even known some cunning patients who kept moving their pains just to confuse me. Anything rather than an operation! But these malingerers have to be tackled in a very careful way. They belong to 'scalpel-fear' tribe. The sight of a knife makes them blench. They have seen dogs and cats run over and they think it is horrid. They are quite right, but they impose their imaginations on their lives, and imagine that an operation table is little short of the rack of Torquemada and the surgeon some inquisitor who is merely interested in the patient's inside for what he can get out of it. (This does not refer to cheques!)

'So, you have indigestion?' I asked. 'Quite right, you have. All abdominal ills start with indigestion.' That pleased and puzzled her. 'But,' I added, remembering that I had kept her waiting, 'my apologies for keeping you waiting.'

'Oh, that's all right,' she replied. 'I've had this pain for years and a mere half-hour won't make any difference.'

I agreed. But what I really meant to say was that I was sorry I was late for such an unprofessional reason as love. I did not tell that to the patient. You must never tell patients about your private life. Surgeons, like ministers of the Church, are not supposed to have them. You are a block of stone, a man of talent, an extractor of malign parts, and that's all.

But if you aren't able to tell your patients the real

reason for your delay, the patients are able to discuss anything they wish amongst themselves in the waiting-room if they want to.

'So', said my patient, 'please don't apologize. I had a most interesting half-hour looking at the exotic furniture in your waiting-room. I collect oriental antiques and was very pleased to see a Ming brush-bowl. Had there not been other patients in the room, I might have run away with it. However, the time went by very quickly as a few of us ladies got chatting about our individual ills. It's amazing how pleasant it is to tell another soul about one's sciatica or indigestion. Common aches seem to cement friendships, don't you think?'

I did think so. As I listened to the story of my patient I remembered the numerous friendships that spring up in doctors' waiting-rooms. They seem to be a most popular place with elderly ladies, almost as popular as a bridge-party.

Friendship is supposed to spring from mutual understanding and sympathy, and what better place can there be for the exercise of these qualities than a doctor's waiting-room?

It is not the experience of common joys, such as one finds on a pleasure cruise, in a theatre, or a swimming pool, it is rather the sharing of suffering and the appreciation of other people's suffering, which has so popularized doctors' waiting-rooms. I am certain that one day an enterprising Harley Street surgeon or doctor will have 'at homes' or special

'Mutual Pains' teas in his waiting-room. He will be as careful as a matrimonial agency to see that the right sort of pains and aches and complaints come together. An appendix scar, for instance, has very little sympathy with a hernia scar, and the conversation between the two scars would be comparatively limited and might quite conceivably end in a quarrel. But bring together a couple of serious abdominal scars, and they will get on fine, telling each other their experiences and complaining of the harshness of the nursing-home matron or the charm of the resident doctor. Broken limbs too get on well with each other. Here an exciting climax can be obtained by withholding the cause of the accident and springing a surprise on the listener, who then pretends to be overcome with horror and proceeds to tell you his or her climax. Plastic surgery scars are more reserved. They are busy telling each other lies about their ages and each one knows very well that both of them consulted the same plastic surgeon. Should they discover this without any unpleasant consequences they will lie about the fees. They will boast that they paid two hundred guineas more than each other. I heard an elderly lady turn this to excellent account by saying, 'but, my dear, the surgeon simply wouldn't take much money off me. He said that I looked so positively young that there wouldn't be very much to do!' That same lady had had her face lifted on three occasions.

Then, of course, there are the X-ray cronies, who

carry their plates about with them to every function as if they were testimonials of good character. 'Here', they say, producing the negative, 'is my liver. Shocking isn't it?' Or 'What do you think of my femur? Frightful, eh? And if only you were to see my urethra—it would frighten you!' She then shows it and you say that you are frightened and then she goes off to someone else to frighten them.

These people treasure their X-rays like heirlooms. I sometimes wonder why they don't hang them up in their drawing-rooms, because they do not let the smallest opportunity slip by without showing people their shocking livers, or frightful femurs, or frightening urethras. Tea-time is of course a grand time to watch the X-rayites having a chin-wag over the dark plates whilst they sip China tea and eat toasted scones.

My patient went so far as to say that she was actually sorry when the receptionist called her to my consulting-room. She was having a most interesting and intimate conversation with her newly found friend. When I evinced some curiosity as to what they found to talk about after such a short acquaintance, I was told politely that it was none of my business. She could not divulge the secret. I was taken aback. What was there, I asked, that could not be told to a doctor? He takes precedence even over a husband.

Then we got to discussing her illness. She divulged that it took her two years to gather up sufficient courage to see a surgeon. Her doctor's letter con-

firmed my suspicion, and when she added that her vicar had said that she had not been looking at all well of late, I did not bother with a lengthy examination. I confirmed the diagnosis and told the patient that there was nothing else to be done but to operate on her. To my surprise she seemed to welcome the suggestion. It thrilled her, she said. This was her first operation, and although she had dreaded the thought before, she was quite pleased to have the experience. So that gave the lie to my previous assertion, that all patients are afraid of operations. Some apparently come for the sheer novelty of the thing.

Number two patient was called for over the house 'phone. Five minutes passed and no-one came. I 'phoned again and asked the receptionist the reason for the delay. She told me that the new-found friends were busy in a conversation. I told her that I would wait for a few more minutes and that if they had not finished their revelations by that time, she was to send me the third patient.

Another five minutes passed, and, just as I expected, my second patient did not turn up; instead the receptionist ushered in a young man of about twenty-one. To my mild astonishment (I have learnt to be astonished at nothing) he was followed by a whole tribe of relatives. I counted at least ten, and I was certain there were a few others who did not wish to embarrass the little standing space there was left and preferred to whisper behind the door.

The others—some of generous size—seized every

LIBRARY

available sitting space and decorated the room to the extent of shutting out all light and breathing up all the air. But I was unperturbed. I thought perhaps that they were debtors coming to pay their bills, but the affectionate interest they paid to the young man who led the cavalcade clearly showed their connection with him.

I looked at the young man who was getting so much attention and asked whether I could be of any assistance. All ten relatives said I could be. Take a chair. They offered me a small chair which was never intended to take my bulk and I sat down like a parrot on a perch.

The mother stepped forward and recited her child's virtues. The father said that his son had won silver cups and obtained diplomas. One of the aunts testified to his moral character, and everybody else nodded their assent. It was, I supposed, up to me to find out what was wrong with him, although it would have been common decency to tell me more about his past illness than about his silver cups and diplomas. But I was well-versed in this sort of scene, when a well-beloved son has to visit a surgeon. I did not pretend to be over-curious. A few polished compliments fell from my lips on the youth's intellectual and sporting prowess.

My professional glance at the youth's anatomy revealed a swelling under the chin, so I pounced on him and held him by the epiglottis. 'It hurts there,' I said almost triumphantly.

'It does,' the boy agreed. The relatives approved of this miracle of divination. How did I guess? one of the relatives asked with bated breath. The growth, I wanted to say, was the size of a young tomato and it was no black magic to notice it. But the layman gets a thrill of mystery if the surgeon leaps at him and rattles off a list of Latin names and prods him in a sensitive spot.

'It has been hurting you for years,' I said with self-assurance that brooked no denial. It had. 'Now it gives you palpitations and you have a peculiar choking feeling when you climb up stairs or run down them.' That was so.

Considering that I had diagnosed his complaint from almost the first glance and certainly on touching the growth in his throat, there was nothing very wonderful about my deductions.

'A cyst of the thyroid gland,' I said grandly, as if I were the Lord Chamberlain announcing the birth of an heir from the palace window. 'A cyst. It means an operation.'

The relatives fell back. For a moment there was a stunned silence. Then, without any warning, they broke up into parties of three and, huddling together, held a long conversation. The mother sobbed convulsively. Mothers always seem to suffer most. The idea of cutting out anything from their offspring is terrible to them. Nearly as bad as the fear that obsessed men in the Dark Ages. They imagined that, if they lost a part of their body, when the last trum-

pet sounded to awaken the dead; they would resurrect without that part, and enter the joys of paradise minus a leg or an arm, etc. There is, I believe, a modern sect which still retains these fears, although I cannot see what there is to fear in entering heaven without an appendix or with only one kidney.

I assured the mother that the operation was not at all dangerous if the growth was taken out in time; but, finding that all I did was wring more tears out of her kind heart, I decided to interest the youngster in the process of the operation itself.

I told him, as he listened with thrilled attention, that he would be fully conscious during the operation, as I would perform it under a local anaesthetic. This pleased him immensely and he asked if he could watch. I regretted that a grandstand could not be erected for him to see the operation, because whilst he would be conscious in the sense that the opening phases of the operation would be conducted whilst he was conscious, the later would find him in a pleasantly deep sleep. The last prophecy proved wrong, because his system was so strong that he stood up against the sleep-producing drug. Of that later, however.

We spent a pleasant half-hour while I explained to him the physiological significances of a cyst. I drew him its formation and gave him a rough idea of how it would be extracted. I knew my patient. He was more encouraged by these details than frightened. The element of mystery and fear was taken out of the

operation for the patient; but not for his mother. She, together with the relatives, had carefully followed my simple description, but somehow she did not appreciate it. She only begged me to assure her that her son would be well. I did this and turned to answer the hundred and one questions that the relatives and the patient were firing at me. It was a sort of duel to see who got exhausted first. I began by answering their questions simply, but finding that they had overstayed their visit by some quarter of an hour I began to infuse my answers with technicalities, which soon bored them. I acclaimed their yawns and had them ushered out. The operation date was fixed and I shook hands all round.

'Well,' I said to my next patient as she came in (I knew her very well), 'have you finished telling your life story to your newly found friend?'

'I have,' she said. 'I have, but don't think that I'm going to tell you what we've been saying. She told me how curious you were when she came in, but there are a few things which even a surgeon should not know!'

'For instance?'

'Ladies' dresses, hairdressers, arrangements for a coming-out party, and surgeon's bills.'

X

SIX O'CLOCK: AFTERNOON

*

I was quite wrong in hoping to dismiss my third patient after a few minutes. With the reprimand she administered to me, she had damped my *curiosity, but there was still a great deal to talk* about. You might like to know how a surgeon spends a whole hour with a patient? He might tell you that he spends it in examination and diagnosis and questioning. The technique of examination I have already explained in a previous chapter. But Mrs. Jones was not that sort of case. She was simply a very pleasant lady whom I knew, not only professionally, but also socially; that is, I had met her at gatherings and parties.

Now, Mrs. Jones, this chapter is about you and all your troubles, but I am sure you will not mind.

As I was saying, the better one knows one's patients the longer they stay. That is the law of the consulting-room. Should one dispense with them after a minute or two, they feel offended, although they

know very well that there are other patients waiting for your valuable attention. But going to Harley Street is, I suppose, something of a social visit, a sort of 'at-home' where you pay your three guineas for a visit and can do what you like with the surgeon. However, I am not complaining, because Mrs. Jones is a most considerate lady and half-way through our hour's talk she inquired whether I had any further patients for that day. I had not.

But let me say something about Mrs. Jones and her daughter. I like people intensely. I like their worries and I try to cure their ills, but sometimes I think that they—and I with them—are nothing more than marionettes at the end of a string. Not a very original thought, but that is the way it worked out with Mrs. Jones's daughter; not that she was in any way a marionette. No. She was a very talented dancer.

She had studied ballet for many years and was at the time of her first visit to me, some few months previously, completing her course. She had shown such zeal that it began to tell on her heart. When she came to me I clearly diagnosed heart-strain.

She was a young and very beautiful maiden and so full of spirits (as a dancer should be) that she refused to take my warning seriously. But I was serious and I am afraid a little relentless. I rang up the director of her company and told him in categorical terms that Miss Jones was not fit for dancing, prancing, or even glancing on anything that looked like a

stage. That was a warning, I said, and if it was ignored, the results would be upon his head.

Mr. Director happened to be a very sensible man and despite the woeful protests of Miss Jones herself, he told her to go on holiday.

When she returned, I was privileged to see her opening night. She was a terrific success, to use the jargon of the theatre. She was a nymph, a dancer of rarity, she was hope for the British balletomanes, she was life itself on two elegant legs. But alack and alas, what do you think happened?

The first night brought her instant success. You would have thought that this would have satisfied the most ambitious, but no. The first night brought her success and a husband!

He was a young man in the diplomatic service. Why is it that young men in diplomatic services always go to ballets and marry the ballerinas. They are a menace. In the old days the peers drew their wives from the Gaiety chorus, and the upper-upper civil services still love a pretty leg. Hence, she was married.

Ten years of hard work (she started ballet as a child. This form of torture has to start early because of the bones and whatnot) went by the board. She quit the theatre. The young diplomat probably thought it indecorous for his wife to dance—although heaven only knows why, because ballet, I think, is one of the most distinguished of the arts.

And so life makes marionettes of us all—to parody

Shakespeare. Miss Jones, however, tells me that she prefers a home, so perhaps she can forget *Les Sylphides*, and the next time she stands up on her toes will be perhaps to amuse her baby. Little will the angel know that it took mama ten years to do that for him, and as she 'dies' in the famous Dying Swan dance—immortalized by Pavlova—the babe will laugh gleefully to himself. She may put up two fingers in the mirror to amuse him—and will see behind her the wooing satyr in *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*. But I mourn like a demented balletomane. They are a stupid sentimental pest, and Miss Jones knows her own happiness best.

And yet, if she hadn't danced, she might never have met her husband, you might well say. You might as well ask what would have happened if Eve hadn't taken the apple from the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

So I 'lost' a patient (Miss Jones went to live with her diplomatic husband on foreign strands) and Mrs. Jones 'lost' a daughter. It was this 'calamity' which brought us together. When Mrs. Jones 'phoned one day to make the appointment for six o'clock, she told me that she had a secret to tell me.

'And the secret?' I asked after we had opened our conversation with pleasantries.

'The secret, Mr. Sava, is not a secret. It is simply this. I feel now that my daughter has gone from me and all the worry attached to looking after her is gone' (she loved her daughter tenderly but always

spoke like this) 'I feel that I can look after myself and have a "good time". I can now breathe—and to breathe properly I want to be young.'

'But you are young,' I parried, 'and besides I have no elixir of youth, unless——'

'Precisely,' said Mrs. Jones, imitating the Girl with the Golden Voice, 'That is what I want you to do for me.'

'But you don't need it. You don't need to have your face lifted for another ten years. Why waste money?'

But Mrs. Jones is a strong character. 'I want to look younger,' she insisted, 'and you are the man to help me.'

I agreed that I was, but was just about to demur again, when she said, 'I've got to do something with my face. I've seen it for forty years and I'm tired of it. Besides the spiders of age have crept under my eyes. . . .'

'They may have,' I replied in oriental fashion, 'but very delicately.'

'Spiders or no spiders, I want the wrinkles ironed out and my face lifted.'

Further protests were in vain. She had made up her mind, so I 'phoned through to a nursing home and arranged for her reception on the Thursday, to be followed by the operation on the Friday. Now I am tempted to describe things that actually happened four days later.

The operation was due at ten o'clock. I visited her

a few minutes before the operation and accompanied her into the theatre. She had agreed to have a local anaesthetic. Little did she know that she was going to be the cause of—well, never mind. Events move faster than words.

I had injected her face with the anaesthetic fluid and was just on the point of taking up the scalpel when one of my assistant surgeons came to the door of the theatre and whispered excitedly, 'Hitler's invaded Poland!'

I returned my knife to the tray and took off my rubber gloves. The news was too much for me. I knew that we were going to have serious trouble. The patient was forgotten for a moment. We all crowded round the paper. Yes, it had happened.

A sudden shout from the theatre-sister sent me spinning round, and I was just in time to see my patient get up from the operating table and say in a very muffled voice, 'I'm not going to have any fancy operations while Mr. Hitler's around!'

I ran after her in an attempt to stop her. 'No,' she said. 'I refuse.'

I could quite understand Mrs. Jones's feelings, so I sent her to bed and when the local anaesthetic had worn off, she went home.

Political events moved fast. By Sunday the 3rd of September we were at war. I saw Mrs. Jones again on a couple of occasions.

Now on this last occasion, she divulged her other secret. She had returned, she told me, to have her face

lifted. Hitler or no Hitler, war or no war, she was going to have it. She upbraided herself. 'There,' she said, 'if you hadn't used that local anaesthetic I should never have known the news and everything would have been all right by now.'

I again put up a barrage of protest. What was the point, I said, of lifting one's face in a war? 'Why not?' she protested. 'Waste of money,' I said, repeating my argument, 'and besides, when you go to heaven none of your friends will recognize you.'

'Then I can send my friends down to visit you—you'll be the only witness to testify that I'm the same Mrs. Jones,' she joked.

In the end, however, I gave way. The war, she told me, had made an appreciable difference to her financial position, so I accepted a bare third of what I usually charge for delicate and difficult operations like this. At the end of the war, I am going to send my bills to Hitler. We shall all want to reckon with him one day, but perhaps the matter will be in other hands. Although I think I should like to compel him to paint water-colours all his life and then try to sell them. The proceeds, I'm afraid, wouldn't pay many of my bills, let alone the whole world's!

On this occasion, Mrs. Jones was very curious about the method of operation and being a very intelligent woman she put some questions to me which will give the layman some idea 'how it is done'.

'Do you leave any scars?' she asked.

'Yes,' I admitted, 'I do. No operation that involves cutting can obviate scars, but I hide them.'

'How do you hide a scar, for instance, which has been made to remove the wrinkles under the eye?'

'Very simply,' I said. 'You see that the scar blends with the lower lid of the eye—just where the eyelashes grow—as a result it is invisible to the naked eye, and as friends don't look at one with a microscope, how could they notice it?'

'You don't know women,' was her reply.

The face-lifting scars are more intricate. They are usually situated behind the ears—almost at the base of them—so they too are practically invisible, unless you turn up a person's ears, and very few people do that. And the scalp and the hair is used to cover any scars necessary as far up on the face as that—so you see it is perfect camouflage.'

'You ought to be in the artillery, Mr. Sava—hiding guns from the enemy.'

'Don't worry,' I answered a little sadly, 'my job hasn't yet begun. When it comes—if it comes—it will be to hide bigger scars than just lifting a lady's face. War will bring all the scars that I shall ever want to obliterate. . . .'

But let me tell you a little joke about face lifting.

A prima ballerina who had seen as many as sixty summers always contrived—by plastic surgery of course—to remain twenty-four. At least that's what she looked in full make-up and with the lights mercifully dimmed down. One day she appeared for the ump-

teenth time at the consulting room of her plastic surgeon. 'Surgeon, surgeon,' she said, 'please do your stuff.'

'No,' said the surgeon, 'I can't.'

'You can't? Why not?' asked the lady angrily.

'Do you see that dimple in the middle of your chin, madam?' the surgeon asked politely.

'I do.'

'Well, that's your navel. . . .

'I don't think we need go on any further with that story, Mrs. Jones.'

XI

SEVEN O'CLOCK: AFTERNOON

*

My polite good-bye to Mrs. Jones froze on my lips as the telephone rattled its empty head and demanded attention. I said, 'Excuse me,' and picked up the receiver.

'Yes, hello, this is Mr. Sava,' I said, emphasizing the 'Mister' and the fact that I was no physician, but a surgeon. 'What can I do for you?'

'I'm Mr. Kingsley,' said a very agitated voice, also emphasizing his status but making it sufficiently clear that he was in no way connected with my line of business. 'I'm Mr. Kingsley, the husband of Mrs. Kingsley,' he continued, being very revealing.

'Oh yes,' said I, pretending that it was as it should be. 'And . . . ?'

'Please come over at once. You must. You simply must hurry, doctor,' Mr. Kingsley implored me.

'Please, Mr. Kingsley, tell me what has happened,' I asked, capturing his tearful voice.

'I've sent her to one of your hospitals.'

'Yes, yes, but what has happened?'

'Something dreadful.'

'But what? What, what????'

'Pardon me, Mrs. Sava, I mean Mr. Sava—really I don't know what I'm saying. I've only been married for two months and now——"

I decided to be firm. We were wasting precious minutes. I had to know what was wrong, otherwise I would not know how to function. 'WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOUR WIFE?' I shouted abruptly.

'It's her teeth——"

'I'm not a dentist,' I snapped. 'And please pull yourself together, Mr. Kingsley. What's happened to your wife's teeth?' I already knew the answer intuitively, but I thought it would be better for Mr. Kingsley to corroborate it.

'She's swallowed them,' Mr. Kingsley said mournfully. 'The whole top row, and she nearly choked.'

'Good Lord,' I said. 'What did you do?'

'I banged her on the back and she swallowed the plate—and——"

There was no more time to be wasted. I managed to get the name of the hospital to which Mr. Kingsley had sent his wife and I 'phoned through and gave orders for an immediate X-ray. I told Mr. Kingsley himself to meet me at the hospital in ten minutes. In the meanwhile I picked up the house telephone and rang my secretary, who told me the whole of the mournful tale. Mr. Kingsley had apparently spent many precious moments explaining to her how his

wife had swallowed her top denture, a rare enough occurrence, but dangerous.

She had been eating a banana and that innocent fruit was the cause of the tragedy. There were exactly five teeth on the plate, Mr. Kingsley had told the secretary, and at each end of the plate there were hooks. The more I listened to the story the surer I was that the poor lady was very lucky to have survived at all. True to habit and fearful of an emergency operation, I 'phoned up the hospital again and got in touch with my house-surgeon. I told him to have the X-rays the moment I came in and to prepare the theatre. He was just about to elaborate some theory or other to me when I cut him short. 'Be over in ten minutes,' I said, 'and then you can spout your head off.'

In ten minutes a diminutive man, wringing his hands and sobbing, met me on the entrance stairs of the hospital. I recognized Mr. Kingsley and shook him warmly by the hand, thereby probably restoring his circulation for him.

'I am the husband,' he said, as if he was the murderer. 'I gave her the banana.'

I could not help smiling at the poor little man's agony, but I knew it was no laughing matter as far as the patient was concerned.

'It was a dreadful blow, a dreadful blow,' he kept on repeating. Then more earnestly he would moan, 'I've never hit her before in my life, but it was necessary, it was necessary.'

I agreed that it was and commended him on his promptitude. I looked at the little chap's muscles. He was very stockily built, and I was certain that he could deliver a pretty cruel blow at close quarters.

I ran along the corridor with the harassed husband trotting behind me. 'You know,' he said, 'I've heard of cases where people swallow pins and needles and coins but never teeth—is it dangerous, doctor? Will my wife live?'

I made no answer but hurried into the private ward to see the patient.

I recognized her at first glance. She had been a patient of mine about two years previously. I think I had to make some slight correction to her nose, but so good was my work, I wasn't able to see the scar! However, although I had forgotten her name, I grinned broadly and said how do you do.

She appeared a little shy. I remember now that I did not inquire whether her teeth were real or false when I did the last operation, because the plastic intervention was done under a local anaesthetic. Had I used a general anaesthetic, I would have asked her as a matter of form. Anyway, she was so young-looking and so pink that no-one would have thought she had false teeth: However, this wasn't a beauty competition.

The examination revealed that she had five front teeth missing, so that would mean a pretty large plate —together with hooks to keep it in place. Her throat was very scratched and there was some minor bleed-

ing; but what was most amusing was that she was not complaining of any pain in her throat or her tummy, but kept on laying her hand on her back. Apparently the blow her husband had given her in saving her life hurt her far more than the severe scraping her throat got by the passing of the plate through the gullet.

The lady radiologist showed me the still wet X-ray plates and my eyes nearly popped out when I beheld a dark object lying in the shallow, dark organ which was definitely the stomach. I could see that this object was very irregular and the two hooks looked magnified into pincers, so that the whole had the appearance of a small lobster or a langouste.

It was obvious that the case was urgent. It seemed a miracle to me that the plate had managed to pass through the throat. Well, miracle or no miracle it had happened and what concerned me most was to get the plate out of the stomach. For one thing was certain—that even if the gullet did let the object through, the pylorus—that is the small passage from the stomach into the intestine—certainly was not large enough for the plate's passage. There was no question of digesting five ivory teeth, an ebonite plate and two metal hooks. This pylorus was very muscular and yet at the same time delicate, and there was the certain danger of obstruction if the object was not taken out. That would mean certain death. Secondly, there was an ever-present danger that the hooks would penetrate the soft linings of the

stomach-walls and so cause peritonitis, again resulting in certain death.

Of course, I did not reason like this with the patient or her husband. I minimized the whole thing and assured them that, while an operation was imperative, if done in time it should not be dangerous. To convince the husband I showed him the plates, which had the very opposite effect I had hoped for. He was terrified. I think he was most frightened by the word operation, although he did not have any other suggestions to make as to the method of extracting the plate. He was also very perturbed by his wife's sobs, and it was all I could do to get him away. He probably thought me a heartless monster and made a silent vow in his heart to keep me waiting for my fees, but I did not mind.

The patient herself was almost unable to give her consent. She merely referred me to George, and George seeing that there was no other way left, agreed.

The initial stages of the operation demanded what is called an upper abdominal laparotomy, an incision, that is, above the navel in the middle line of the body. When the stomach itself was exposed I was able to see that the organ was not empty but full of fluid—haemorrhage, probably caused by the hooks of the dental plate.

I selected the highest place on the anterior stomach wall on which to make the incision. I was careful to see that I was clear of all the big vessels and would

do as little damage as possible. Then I made my two-inch incision, and left it to my assistant to hold it open with two special hooks, called retractors. Then I managed to enter into the stomach itself with long pincers and slowly and with great care I seized the plate and extracted it.

The contents of the stomach were sucked out with a special apparatus which was so designed as to prevent any leakage into the perineal cavity. The incision was then closed with three layers of catgut, one row for each layer of the stomach, and half an hour later I was already out in the corridor assuring Mr. Kingsley that his wife would be all right.

'The only inconvenience,' I said cheerfully, 'will be that your wife will walk about with a small scar in the middle of her tummy.' But Mr. Kingsley replied devoutly that he exonerated me completely and that if she lived, he would be eternally grateful to me, so, by way of a compliment, I commended him for his prompt action in beating his wife on the back.

'I would never have struck her but for my grandmother. She told me once that her life had been saved by her husband thrashing her on the back—although I don't think it had anything to do with an artificial plate. He merely beat her because she had gone out unchaperoned, so I can hardly say that history has repeated itself. . . .'

It's amazing what sort of rot people talk when a great weight has been lifted off their minds.

'Do you know,' said Mr. Kingsley, 'all this bother and worry has given me a violent appetite. How about having dinner with me, Mr. Sava?'

'No, Mr. Kingsley,' said I, 'I have an appointment. But I'll take your lesson to heart and never offer a lady a banana.'

XII

EIGHT O'CLOCK: EVENING

*

Despite the unusualness of the operation I had just performed, I managed to be punctual in meeting some friends of mine at eight.

It so happened that my fiancée decided to celebrate our engagement at a private party at the Hungaria. She had, however, left the calling of guests to the last moment. There was her sister for one, whom she felt ought to participate in the jollifications, and she also discovered two of her dearest friends without engagements for the evening. The summons had come a little too late for the ladies to find themselves partners, but they said that as long as I did not mind taking four ladies in tow they would be only too pleased to enter into the spirit of the fun.

Of what interest, one might ask, is a private dinner party, especially to people who have dined and wined well? No interest whatever, I confess, but I have no intention of whetting anyone's appetite with a recital of the menu or a description of the wines, although

writers, I suspect, may do good national service with imaginative descriptions of tasty dishes in these days of rations.

What was interesting to me about this dinner party, was the fact that one of the guests was a definite, and from what I could understand from Dorothy, a most out-spoken foreigner-phobe. 'Fee-fi-fo-fum, I smell the flesh of a foreigner,' and her pretty nostrils would curl up. No matter whether that foreigner was distinguished in letters, the sciences, or the arts, if he was a foreigner he was doomed without a hearing. She was most indefinite about her dislike of foreigners. It had perhaps eaten into her subconscious. As a child she might have seen films of foreign anarchists blowing up the Bank of England; or she might have read anthropology at Oxford, for all I know, and discovered some pretty disgusting habits among the aboriginals of Terra Nuova; or perhaps she detested garlic in Italian food, berets, Russian vodka, the lascivious tango of the Spanish, the heavy little wooden shoes of the Dutch, and the vulgarity of the Germans. Well, whatever it was, she hated foreigners. They were a breed apart. They lived somewhere beyond the North Sea. They had revolutions and rumours of revolutions. Their policemen were not gracious. Their streets were prone to be dirty, and, most heinous crime of all, they did not speak English —that is, no-one except waiters, taxi-cab drivers, hotel managers, policemen, and the educated classes. And although three-quarters of the globe was popu-

lated by these aliens, she felt that the sun had no right to shine on them with exactly the same warmth as it shone on the English colonies of Monte and Biarritz and St. Moritz.

For good or for bad she had travelled pretty extensively on the Continent. She knew the best places in France and Italy. Austria, in happier days, she had visited. Switzerland she knew as a place of finishing schools and luxurious hotels and ski-ing. She had taken the waters at Monte Catini, I discovered, and found them foul-tasting. Some of the Michelangelo paintings at the Sistine Chapel and at the Villa Borghese had, she told me, shocked her. The body beautiful done in nude she did not mind, but the postures, my dear, reminded her of Parisian stationery.

Having heard all this, I felt very nervous as to the impression I was making on this charming young Scotswoman. She was a pretty lass, with a turned up nose. Perhaps it had got like that sniffing at the canals in Venice or meeting the wrong sort of people at the Excelsior? Who knew? Who cared?

Yes, she was definitely pretty. I might have said beautiful. She had a very self-assured air about her. The woman who had travelled. She was, I suspect, slightly ashamed of the fact. I could see her in my mind's eye, scrubbing off all her luggage labels when she returned home to Scotland and putting on her tweed skirt and hat and pacing through her native moors muttering Scott to herself.

In view of these things, I kept very silent. I wanted

to find out what it was that she really disliked about foreigners, and I was not prepared to give her any help in her diagnosis.

She told with glee the story that when she was asked in Paris whether she was a foreigner, she said, 'No, I'm not a foreigner, I'm English!'

Katherine was the young lady's name. She had travelled extensively, but had met extraordinarily few foreigners. She had seen a few picturesque specimens, she admitted, on walks and tours, but she felt certain that they had been planted there by the tourist agencies or by the solicitous hotel management.

'And those ridiculous little houses on the Italian hills,' she said. 'How could people ever live there? It's sheer scenery, that's what it is.'

Little did she know of the life of the people as they went on with their back-breaking work, planting the creeping vine on the highest mountain-tops, scooping up the earth from the valleys and taking it up in small wicker baskets so as to give the plant a sustaining hold. Little did she know of the tale of women broken in their prime and the incest that flourished in the lost settlements in the Italian hills. From her comfortable glass-lounge in the hotels, she imagined that the children spent an idyllic existence herding the goats and the cows. She loved their gay little rags and sad wizened faces. And as for their cowdung-plastered houses, well they were very cute, but smelly. She did not know of the grinding poverty that made men grow grapes on the earth they had

stolen from the valleys and carted up to the small jutting plateaux on the mountain-sides. That work, that lifetime of work, did not go into the price of a bottle of wine, signori.

In all her travels I doubt very much if this charming and beautiful young lady had ever met more than perhaps a score of 'real' foreigners. They probably included such people as railway porters or the hosts at native hostelries, and the rest were the polished, well-dressed, and frequently impecunious boys and girls who shark in the shallow waters of the wealthy playgrounds of Europe.

She had, however, an amusing tale to tell about some Nazi officers in Vienna. She went to Vienna—when Vienna had lost her spontaneous gaiety. The jack-boot of the Nazi Party was in her waltzing-rooms and the guttural accent of the Prussians was trying to sing the 'Blue Danube'. However, the travel propagandists saw that the foreigner could amuse himself and spend his money freely.

One day Katherine and a friend of hers entered a fashionable café. In order to get to a vacant table they had to pass a group of young Nazi officers who were spending their leave in looking out for the prettiest girls. The very masculine cut of their uniforms was designed perhaps to no better purpose.

As the young ladies passed their table the Blond Gods were quick to notice their beauty and charm, and being young bloods they behaved after the manner of Nazi officers and expressed their appreciation

in loud remarks—so that the girls would undoubtedly realize to whom these remarks were being addressed.

In some countries such direct attention is a compliment to the lady. In Italy, for instance, a woman would be more than slighted if no-one took any notice of her as she walked down the street—accompanied or not. Indeed, she would be grateful for the glance—what am I saying?—the stare of the errand boy, as much as for the suave glance and shake of the appreciative head from a high officer. This is a tribute and one which must be paid so long as Italian women live in Italy—and that will probably be for a good time yet.

So these Nazi officers passed loud remarks. The girls, with the dignity of Anglo-Saxons, and despite their affinity to the blood Germanic, cut them dead. They did not even bother to look their way. They did not exist as far as they were concerned. This naturally fanned the ardour—or should it be interest?—of the officers. And at long last one of them, more audacious than the others, sent a note.

The waiter carried the note over to the girls' table gingerly and respectfully.

The note read: 'We have noticed that you are English. We like the English very much. Would you join us at our table? Heil Hitler—Lieutenant Friedrich.'

Katherine, the charming Katherine, smiled a siren smile as she read the note. The hearts of the officers beat faster.

When the note was returned to them by the same

waiter in the same delicate fashion, they read: 'You are very nice also, but we would not care to sit at your table. Heil Hitler—can go to Hell.'

This caused a considerable flutter. For a moment Katherine, the brave Scots lass, thought that instead of sharing the hospitality of the officers' table she would be tasting the comforts of a Gestapo prison. But the young men merely smiled blandly and sheepishly, and, as the girls left the restaurant, they sprang up and made the Hitler salute.

Katherine, the courageous one, eyed them with a cold look of disdain, and turning to her companion said in loud German, 'I wonder in what garden those weeds have grown?'

A petrified silence. Waiters going pale. The secret police putting their hands in their secret pockets and touching their secret revolvers. And then the officers burst out laughing. *Wunderschoen!*

I too nearly raised the roof—or is it floor?—of the Hungaria with my laughter. But the music was playing and the double bass 'cellos were throbbing very low and nobody noticed my booming. Katherine was good enough to confess that I was 'different' and that she even liked me being a foreigner. She even appreciated the slight irony of my bow.

My fiancée warned Katherine of my biceps—but the frightening effect was totally lost because Katherine did not know where I kept them, and I promised her a lesson in simple anatomy as we danced. I meant an objective lesson, of course.

The Hungarian music made me melancholy. I suppose that's exactly what it is supposed to do out of the wild mad hearts of the gipsies and into their violin strings and then out again into a plaintive wail —that's what it sounds to my ears. But it also 'sounds' to my eyes.

I see again the soft green of my native steppes and smell the earth after the rain and remember my childhood's springs. There are quiet rivers running by through the flat land somewhere in my memory, and I remember walks along the banks, the riding exercises, and the large white house in which I lived —and the old old melancholia comes back again and the sense of exile and strangeness deepens.

And music brought back all this. The strange music of a wandering people, travelling by the same routes as Alexander the Great on his way out of India, earning their keep not by conquests and commerce, but by songs and stealing. . . .

A waiter approached me and interrupted my dreams. There was a phone call for me. I knew that the time of my departure had come even before I got up from my chair.

'I'm terribly sorry,' I said. 'It is probably a patient. Perhaps you can stay behind and enjoy yourselves.' It was a silly thing to say—but the three girls endeavoured to look as cheerful as they could.

'No,' they said. 'You can take us home. We are very tired.'

XIII

NINE O'CLOCK: EVENING

*

I had damped the good spirits of the party. I had sabotaged what promised to be a very amusing and lively evening, but I had a good excuse. I was a doctor. Not for me the honeyed hours. I was liable for service at any hour. My hours were worse than a chambermaid's, and I never got regular time off. Frequently I imagined that I would run to schedule, but people have a careless habit of falling ill at unearthly hours or choosing the midnight hour for accidents. Humanity—I parodied Nero's saying—ought to have one large body, that could be cured and would stay cured. However——

The car wireless was exuding sweet music, provided, I believe, for listeners by the Hotel Dorchester. The drummer boy was going mad and someone sang Hi-di-Ho. Outside the blackout was very black. My car lights—such as were allowed—tried valiantly to pierce the gloom. A mist was spreading from Hyde Park and settling comfortably on the roadway. The

small crosses of the traffic lights looked like ghoulish eyes staring at me from a nightmare. They winked malevolently or changed at the most inconvenient spots while I drove the car at a funeral pace.

'Oh take me back to Hawaii,' a crooner was pleading over the wireless. I would have gone anywhere to have escaped the mist-mucked blackout and the scrambling shadows of pedestrians that darted about the roadway like rabbits. A few considerate souls shone powerful torches into my eyes—I suppose as a warning that they had decided to cross the road. I jammed my brakes on and prayed that no-one would crumple up my rear fenders.

Then, of course, there were the pedestrians wearing luminous signs in their lapels. They looked like disembodied glow-worms. It was like a Hans Andersen fairy tale, only I was caught in the grip of the story and made a puppet of fate.

Suddenly—why do all things happen like that—but suddenly just as I was approaching Saint George's Hospital and turning into Knightsbridge, a figure, a shadow, a will o' the wisp, darted into my car-lamp's anaemic glow and I heard a muffled rattle as the front of the car struck something. The brakes had been applied automatically and our four bodies in the car shot forward as if we had struck a wall. I swore. I swore in Russian. I was later told that it sounded most beautiful, almost like a marriage proposal, but then Russian is such a musical language

that even a phrase like 'pass me the salt, if you please', sounds like a lyric prayer.

I swore and leapt out of the car and rushed over to the dark mass which lay prostrate in front of it. Just as I was about to kneel down and inspect the damage, the mass arose gloomily and shook its head as if uncertain whether it still had its brains.

'I'm sorry, old man,' I said (it might have been an old woman for all I knew, but it's better to call a lady 'old man' than a man 'old woman'—heaven only knows why). 'Are you hurt?'

'I'm not dead?' asked a man's voice in a puzzled tone.

'No,' I said cheerfully, 'not dead. But are you hurt?'

I helped the man to get on his feet and noticing a coffee stall across the road, I took him there.

This was certainly a queer way of finding a patient. In the dim glow of the stall, I looked at the man I had nearly killed. He was about thirty-two years old, with a haggard face, and rather weary-looking blue eyes.

'Could you let him sit down?' I asked the stall-holder. He was only too pleased.

'Thank you,' said the man, sitting down. 'Thank you also for stopping in time. I thought I was a gonner. It was all my fault.'

'Oh, no,' I said, refusing to let the man be so generous. 'Although it is difficult driving in the dark.

I'm a doctor,' I said, trying not to sound too ironic, 'perhaps you will let me examine you?'

The man surrendered to my examination. He didn't seem very interested in it. I tested bones and muscles. The joints were sound, but there was some superficial bruising. It was a little miracle how he had escaped, but there was no point in getting religious at that time of the night. He swallowed the glass of water that was proffered to him by the coffee-stall proprietor.

'I was thinking,' he said deliberately. 'I have been looking for a job the whole of the day. I had found one—so I began to think.'

'Give him something to eat,' I told the stall-holder. I knew what it was to be out of a job. There was nothing else left to do but think. I had walked about the streets of Paris doing exactly that. It helps to keep hunger away and makes one forget one's stomach. A peculiar instrument, the stomach, and a nuisance. You spent most of your life feeding it, and when you couldn't feed it, you had to think. You thought all sorts of things. You thought of why you had a stomach. Why had it been made to fill? Why couldn't it just look after itself. Just think how civilization could have changed if people did not have to worry about their stomachs. There would be more time for building pyramids, temples, the undergrounds, more time for writing books, reading them, painting, listening to music. What a curse the stomach was! And yet, there it was inside one, light and

empty and painful, a ridiculous membrane needing so many calories, vitamins, and juices, without which it would crumple up and die—and there is nothing your brain can do which can keep it alive. No amount of wonderful thoughts, no amount of sonnets, philosophies, and dreams would feed your stomach. The philosopher had to eat, and the poet. It was terribly gross, you thought, this life-organization, but you'd sell your soul to Mephisto for a juicy Châteaubriant, you'd sell the poems and the dreams for a slice of thick bread and butter. And that's what you were doing all your life, you said to yourself, selling yourself and your poems and dreams for bread and butter. You couldn't do what you liked, otherwise your stomach would go hungry. Somehow you had to contrive to be a great surgeon or a Shakespeare in between times of earning bread and butter. And then you began thinking of greed and having more than your share? For what? Why, for the stomach, of course. Didn't you notice that bankers had large stomachs, and stockbrokers. They earned their bread and butter because of their stomachs.

You had seen fine actors and actresses playing in cheap vulgar roles. Why? Because they had stomachs. Some musicians preferred to forget their stomachs, and what happened? They starved and died shortly after of ulcer in the stomach. It got you both ways. You either died trying to produce something worth while because nobody thought it worth while —certainly not worth such important things as bread

and butter—or you didn't produce anything worth while, but got bread and butter. Of course, some people managed to earn their bread and butter and then forget about their stomachs. Royalties, huge fees, salaries looked after their stomachs. Then you could forget about the wretched organ. You would probably never refer to it again if you had breakfast, lunch, tea, and dinner one after the other at certain stated hours. You'd never think of anything so vulgar as your stomach. You talk of your palate then. You're not interested in keeping your stomach full any longer; you like it empty, and you like to tickle it with hors-d'œuvres, oysters, and excellent dry wines.

Take love, for instance. That was also a matter of stomach. If you loved someone you had also to love their stomach. I don't mean in any sexual sense—although even that is plausible—but if you have serious intentions (or even not so serious) you have to feed the loved one's stomach. That's what happens after marriage and even before marriage. You suddenly find you've got two stomachs to look after. It's rather a surprise at first. It's got nothing to do with love, because everybody knows and says that love has to eat as well as love. It's eating again. It's the stomach again, coming into love, of all things, giving trouble around seven o'clock if it's a regular stomach and saying the kissing and cuddling can wait, but not the stomach. That will cry and wail and protest and demand to be fed on something more substan-

tial than 'darling', 'dearest', and such sweeticums. So the sign of the stomach is everywhere. You can't escape it. It's the sign of life. It's the chemistry of the soul. But enough of this. Enough of stomachs.

'So you were thinking,' I said sympathetically. 'You can tell me all about it after you've had a good meal. Here's my phone number. If I can do anything for you, ring me up.'

I handed some shillings to the stall-holder, who was already massing his viands on a plate. That was the best cure for thinking I knew of.

I returned after some twenty minutes to my friends in the car. I told them the story and they upbraided me for giving the man my phone number. Blackmail.

'Pah!' I said.

'People run under cars for insurance. They are crooks.'

'Pah!' I said. 'People also think to forget they are hungry and wander across the road in their dreams. What's it matter to them anyway? They either get killed by being starved—body and soul—or a motor-car breaks their bodies in half for them.'

'Don't be gruesome.'

'I won't be,' I said, switching the wireless louder. The crooner was saying that he had a pocketful of dreams. I should care! He had a full stomach, that's all that mattered on this cold and frosty night, when even old King Wenceslas would never have looked out of his castle window.

A few minutes later I had left the girls at their re-

spective homes and went immediately to the patient to whom I was summoned.

Before seeing her the husband told me that my secretary had rung through. I had warned her that I was coming to this place. She wanted me to ring her back. I did.

A man had called up to say how grateful he was to me for all my kindness. He was feeling much better, although a trifle shaky. He had also told the secretary his life story. Why shouldn't he? The life story is the most interesting thing you can tell about yourself and it's stranger than fiction, they say.

He had studied for the bar, hoping for a respectable legal profession. He could have made more money studying for the real bar, learning to mix cocktails and how to pour out the exact dose of liquor, and he would have profited. He didn't. He wanted to be a barrister, but money ran short. Then he tried his luck in ink. Not selling ink or manufacturing it, but using it. He began to write. He wrote thirty plays and some novels, but fame never came to him—not even bread and butter, but he still went on writing. In the end he became a philosopher—which is about the best thing you can become if your books don't sell. He had been a philosopher for about two years and he hadn't eaten very much for the same period. It was a bad profession, almost as bad as writing, and there is little demand for philosophers nowadays.

I determined to do what I could for him; for all I

knew I might 'discover' a real writer. It's worth trying. Human personalities are such mysterious things, and anyway I had brought him out of the jaws of death.

Then I went up to my patient. In half an hour a baby was born—also with a stomach. What would he be, this minute creature that I had just brought out of the jaws of life? Would he also try his luck and be a philosopher—or would the call of the stomach, that arch-enemy, conquer him into submission?

XIV.

TEN O'CLOCK: NIGHT

*

I was very tired, and when I returned from the car journey in which I had nearly taken a man's life and delivered a woman of a healthy baby, I walked into my drawing-room and sat down in an arm-chair in my overcoat. My nerves were very exhausted and movement became difficult. I felt as if I was drugged. I wanted more than anything else to sleep. But the exertion of getting up and undressing was too much for me. I decided to sit awhile and regain my strength.

Dim, cloudy thoughts were passing through my mind. I could not crystallize anything into a definite pattern. I saw the face of the man I had nearly run over; the face of the child's father; his happy smile when I told him he had a son; the worn and weary smile on the face of the mother; and there was Katherine and the Nazi officers hanging about in the corners of my consciousness. I was going to sleep.

By an effort of will, I roused myself. I straightened my shoulders and yawned, then forced myself to

stand up by pressing my hands on the arms of the chair and levering myself up. It would be much more comfortable to take the overcoat off and lie in the luxury of a warm bed. A few quotations from Shakespeare and Sir Philip Sidney came to mind—but I was too lazy to repeat them. They are calm and assuaging to the overwrought nerves, but I wanted some gentle voice to repeat them to me as I fell asleep.

In my bedroom the overcoat came off and slumped heavily on to the floor. I did not bother to pick it up. Morning would do for tidiness; the morning would bring strength and an interest in tidiness. Who cared about domestic virtues when he was very tired?

It was cold taking the shirt off, and colder still putting on pyjamas. I shivered. The shivering was increased by the tiredness, and it was not until I had got into the bed that my teeth stopped chattering. I pulled the bedclothes around my neck and unfolded my ear so that it lay flat on the pillow. Now for some deep, undisturbed sleep.

But little did I know the human mind. Brain aberrations, tumours, schizophrenia, these I had seen and in some cases had attended, but a tired brain was beyond my province. I could not wrestle with the subconscious. Behind the veil of reason, images, ideas, persons, and places mixed like a whirlpool, throwing up memories and nightmares casually and with them a strange recording of noises, scenes, and sensations.

The pillow yielded softly under my head; the blan-

kets imprisoned warmth, and the darkness pulsed softly on my eyelids. And I went to sleep.

Suddenly I heard a bell, a bell which grew and grew in intensity and which finally filled my ears with such a painful throb that I felt the whole of my head expanding and contracting. Then I heard an explosion. I jumped out of bed and hurriedly slipped my trousers on and ran into the corridor.

My housekeeper was standing near the door, with her eyes staring and her mouth trying frantically to express some message. I guessed what it was. The bombers, they had come.

'Bring my emergency box and medical case,' I said in a cold, matter-of-fact voice. Somehow the release from uncertainty restored my professional calm. I would have to go out into the streets and see what damage had been done. It was my business, nay my duty, to preserve a calm exterior.

The housekeeper and I got into the street and were immediately marshalled into a shelter which was conveniently situated right opposite the flat I was occupying.

'I'm a doctor,' I said; 'is there anyone hurt?'

'No, no-one.'

Was there anything I could do?

'No, nothing.'

We made our way into the shelter. A number of people, more curious perhaps than the rest, were lingering around the entrance. Their eyes were strained to the sky, and they moved their hands up

to their faces and whispered: 'Wonder where they dropped them?'—'Hope no-one got killed . . . ?'

I did not listen to their conversation. Somehow what they said or thought did not matter then. They were queer, unreal figures, whispering in the night and looking at the sky. What did all their looking and whispering matter? My job was the body. I had to see that their bodies were whole, and if broken I had to patch them up. I had to keep the blood in their veins. I had a first-aid outfit and my medical case to do that. That was my job. The rest—the bombers, the whisper and the night—was not my affair. I hadn't made either of them. God had made the night. He had made it for stars and for rest, but if man chose to send iron rain to break up the bodies of his fellow men, I wasn't concerned; I, who fought microbes and appendices and brain tumours, I could fight the worst ravages of bombs, providing they left a heart in a man's body, providing all these things that science says have to be provided if the human body is to live.

And all these people in the shelter looked very real and alive people. They had their hearts and their heads; only they whispered.

Over there in the corner was a man being cheerful. His teeth were chattering, but he was being cheerful. He told the same joke at least three times and he laughed at it every time. The elderly women had somehow or other got together. They were looking helplessly at their gas-masks.

'Don't bother about them,' a young man advised. 'There hasn't been a gas-warning. Only bombs, I guess.'

Cool, comforting words, those. Only bombs! But the old ladies decided to try on their gas-masks. They slipped them self-consciously over their faces and looked hideous. Then some others followed suit; soon everybody was wearing them. They were just trying them on and testing them by taking deep breaths and holding up pieces of paper to the nozzles to see whether the air came through from the sides.

How alike everyone looked in the gas-masks. I mean their faces. A sort of totalitarian ugliness, imposed by the dictators on this liberty-loving island. They suited the very aged or the ugly, because then they were the same as the young and the beautiful. It did justice only to them. It was like the former Turkish woman's veil. You can't see what is underneath until you pull it down. Gone are the tuckets and the trumpets of medieval warfare and the pennants and embroidered standards, gone are the cavaliers riding caparisoned horses and singing songs, all, all are gone. There remains only the ugliness of war, the same essential ugliness of death no matter when it comes or how. Ugly not always because of its exterior but because it is the negation of life. But these people in gas-masks were wearing ugliness on their faces in order to be preserved, in order to live. Man would descend to any indignity to live. He would

tear up the flowers of the field to kill men digging trenches, and he would build himself a house of concrete to save himself. And like the flowers that he killed in the field with his poisonous gas and his metal—poor, incidental victims—so would he kill the young and the beautiful—poor, incidental victims too. 'They just got in the light of the bombs,' he would say. 'I didn't mean to bomb them.'

I went out to get some fresh air. The sirens had stopped wailing their death-moans, and I also looked up at the sky. The white parallel lines of searchlights moved slowly over it. They were calm and precise and unhurried. All of a sudden the rays converged. The detectors had done their work and an airplane was caught in the meshes of light. Was he the advance guard, we wondered—the scout, so to speak, for the fleet of bombers which was coming to annihilate us?

We heard guns exploding far away, and the air-raid wardens were telling us to get under shelter. There was a danger of being hit by our own shell splinters, and there was nothing heroic in that. Nevertheless, I was not prepared to go back to the shelter. I realized that I might be needed at the hospital—if something did happen.

'Just wait until our fighters get at them,' said a man who was standing next to me. I couldn't recognize his sex in the dark except by his voice, and should I have been inclined to peer closer I should have found the face in a mask. He felt brave. He identified

himself with the fighters. A fine strong word, 'fighters', but he was scared. We were all scared.

What was the use of pretending that we were brave and that we were waiting with equanimity. If we had experienced an air-raid before we might have been brave. We would have known how far our fears were justified, we would have had our baptism of fear and fire, but in this case we were innocent, we were wondering at all the machinations of the military and aeronautical sciences. How beautiful the searchlights looked. Wonder if we could keep them on after the war and give free shows at night—flashing them about the sky and making merry amongst the soft white clouds. The clouds were the same and the sky, but there was an evil determination to kill in the guns—although those puffs of smoke looked remote and like cotton-wool.

The fear during an air-raid is something unique. It is like going through a jungle infested with poisonous snakes and inhabited by tigers, one snake and one tiger for every tree. You don't know when the danger will strike you. You wonder what it will be like if an aeroplane sows a nice fat bomb right plonk at your feet. You have the comfortable realization that nothing on earth will save you if it does, or if it makes a direct hit on the shelter. No good consoling yourself with statistics. Your chances are two hundred to one, or perhaps even more, but someone gets hit and some house demolished somewhere. It might as easily be you as anyone else. No, it was the un-

known danger that was dreadful. You just couldn't protect your head enough, although you knew that most of the casualties are caused by a bomb spreading outwards.

You had read a lot about bombs. I had anyway. If you couldn't find shelter the best thing was to stay where you were and to flop on the ground. You had also to bite rubber to keep your mouth open to save your ear-drums. This was scientific war—you had to fight it with your brain and not your brawn.

The gunfire from the anti-aircraft grew more and more intense, but the people in the shelter had had time to know each other and they were talking cheerfully with each other. One sex was talking about the increase in the prices of food and clothing and the other was holding a political debate. Some were out for making the world a better place and some were smiling sardonically. The classes had found their level and were careful not to mix in the wrong proportions. The electric light in the shelter was bright. I was still thinking of how to get to the hospital.

Someone was knitting a balaclava for the 'boys'. I could hear her counting the stitches aloud as she came to some tricky bit. She was knitting in a gas-mask, and every now and again she would look up and open her eyes wide. She was a pretty old woman, and when she spoke she was very cynical about the whole war. She had known the other Great War, also the Boer War, also the Zulu, also and also and also. . . . And she thought we were a group of stupid

dumb children who let ourselves get into a mess and then become heroic and tried to blast our way out of an impasse.

Crash! There was a great noise. I stood dead still for a moment and opened my mouth. It was only a second, but the silence after the crash was like eternity. Then bedlam broke out.

The lights in the shelter went out. Men and women struggled for the doorway. Someone was trying to stem the rush by shouting out, 'Now don't panic', but there was no-one to hear, they all streamed out of shelter and carried me with the tide.

A bomb had dropped some four hundred yards away and had killed some people who were hanging about outside their houses. A grim warning to the searchers of the sky.

Four hundred yards, I thought. If the plane had been flying at a slightly increased speed or if the wind velocity had been greater or less, if I had been going to the hospital in my car at that moment, or if. . . . I threw away my speculations. They were cheap. I was alive and somewhere farther down the road there were the dying.

'I'm a doctor,' I yelled, and miraculously the crowd parted for me. Hurry, hurry, hurry! I pushed frantically. Away with you—you the whole and sound, away with you. I was running to help them, the wounded, the dying.

I reached the first-aid post. A crowd of people were surging round it. The same sort of crowd as I had

seen in the shelter. They had taken off their masks and were clamouring to help with the wounded. Men went out with the uniformed anti-air-raid forces and brought back people on stretchers. A very high-class lady was helping her maid to her feet—she had been hit by falling masonry. There was a smell of blood. Of fresh blood. A stretcher was laid down near me. 'Surgeon?' they asked. I nodded.

The mangled remains were beyond my aid. I took out the morphia and a syringe. That was the last service I could perform for him. Take him away. Next? A small girl with a broken foot. Don't bandage her. Leave it to be done at the hospital. I can't attend to her. The mother that had brought her understood. There were more urgent cases to be attended to.

The nurse was wiping the blood off a man's face. Broken jaw? A woman was pathetically holding out her broken wrist and crying. I worked on and on. There was no time for pity. It was a job like carpentry. I was just patching them up and sending them down to the casualty stations. So long as I stopped the blood that was all I could do—if I was to attend to them all. More doctors came and nurses, and the ring of ambulances was perpetual in my ears. The sweat was eating into my eyes, but I was smiling. I was smiling because neither bombs nor death had altered the courage of the people—because each one showed the best in him under dreadful circumstances. Mistress and maid, workman and boss had been struck down—and now they were helping each

other to regain life. They were positively loving each other. Was a bombing necessary to bring them all together like this?

Slowly the scene quietened. People were ordered back to the shelters. There was less talking. I still had much work to do. Then the sirens sounded again. This time it was the all-clear signal. And life returned again and people went back to their beds. Only I worked on and on. It was like the miracle of the loaves and fishes—the more people I attended to the more there seemed to need attention. They were all around me now, bleeding and with broken bones. And my arm ached with bandaging and setting and injecting. I was so tired that I began to cry. I began sobbing and sobbing.

And then I woke up. This is a dull dénouement well known to literature, and has had too long a run in fiction to be believed, but truth cannot be limited by literary niceties. That's exactly what happened. I awoke sobbing and the telephone bell at my side was ringing furiously. In the space of a few seconds I had covered the whole of my dream.

'Hello? Yes, this is Mr. Sava? You want me to come over? You've had a bad accident—what sort?' I asked, and then added involuntarily: 'Not an air-raid?'

'Oh, no, just a motor accident. Five people involved.'

That was all.

XV

ELEVEN O'CLOCK: NIGHT

*

It is hard to scrape a bad dream out of one's eyes, but it is still more difficult to burn bitterness and bewilderment out of one's heart.

It was a short walk to get to the garage where I kept my car, but exercise and the chill wet wind of November invigorated me, and what I had just seen in a dream I was re-living in my mind. For a while I walked very lonely on this planet, Baker Street was quite deserted, and I had the impression of vastness and eternity as I gazed at the impenetrable blackout.

I felt that the world had died, and I was the last survivor of the tribe of man. Trees, animals, and birds still lived around me, I was sure. I could feel their presence in the darkness. They were quiet and asleep and premeditating no death and murder at this hour. They slept with calm assurance that tomorrow the sun would rise and life begin anew; but I walked alone on the earth, the last of man.

Why was I hurrying? I asked myself. I had to get to a hospital. What hospital? Someone had been hurt by an accident. I smiled to myself. An hallucination. How could there be an accident to anyone when I was the only one alive.

The others, they were all dead. They had sung their song and had ceased to be. They had built their buildings, and the buildings were deserted. They had planned discoveries that now would never be fulfilled. They had written music, but there were no ears to hear it now and no hands to play it.

But, of course, they are not dead, I said aloud. They are at war. That is not quite the same. Their spirit may be dead, but not their bodies. . . .

And then I thought of this war, the most curious war in history surely. And why curious? Simply because it is the first war in history that is waged without hate, certainly on our side. It is perhaps the highest mark of the civilized man that, when war is forced upon him, he is able to control his passions despite provocation, despite the murder of his own people, and despite ruin to himself. He is able to objectivize the whole horrid business. And whatever has been said in praise of past civilizations, however much their age glittered with the gems of literature, art, the social sciences, drama and music, one civilization will stand out amongst all others for its humanity and for the nobility of its purpose.

It may be that we are fighting for our existence, but we are not fighting as animals fight. We have not

pulled out our claws and struck indiscriminately at the enemy, causing misery and suffering to the innocent. Our seas have been sown with magnetic mines, our ships sunk without any provision made for their crews, traps are laid for our troops—all these things are done in contravention of the laws that govern so-called 'civilized' war. We have borne the blows and will continue to bear them without resorting to barbarism and committing crimes against our consciences and posterity.

It is difficult not to personalize the conflict and blame one man. He stands before the bar of history with as bloody hands as Nero or Attila, stained not only with the blood of strangers but with the blood of his own people. He is a malevolent comet. Something that appears once every so often in the history of man—a flash, as it were, across the sky of history—and disappears in a cloud of dust, unregretted. But he, too, is a victim of the circumstances that were created in the melting-pot of history. He happened to be born at the right time and happened to be able to catch the German people at their lowest intellectual and spiritual ebb. What propaganda and lying could not achieve, the concentration camps did: they managed to subdue the brave and the good.

He sought to mould his foreign policy on the same lines as his internal policy. He blew his trumpets before the gates of Democracy. He threatened war and, under a mask of peace, he planned it. He called his foes degenerates and promised them the whip and

the bayonet. He unleashed war on them and sought by terror to frighten us. We gave him blow for blow, but we could not hate the people he had led into war against us. Him we hate. But it is no passionate hate, no 'hang the Kaiser' hate. It is the cold dispassionate hate of scientists who endeavour to destroy a virulence. We have shone our truth on his lies and his lies have melted before that searchlight. We have sunk his ships but we have saved his crews. We have waged our war in the same way as we play a game of cricket. Let those that care to laugh, laugh. It may sound Kiplingesque, but it is true. Whatever our sins may have been in the past, we are the elder brother in the concert of nations, and we have long, long ago realized the futility of 'frightfulness'. If we have not always ruled with love, we have ruled with justice.

And it is of the humanity and the heavy-heartedness of this war that I sing. What horror there will be will lie on the conscience of one man alone, Herr Adolf Hitler, but his conscience is already so overloaded that it is no longer a matter of putting anything else on it. One day we shall pick him up with pincers and consign him to the dustbins of history. The pity of it is that we did not do so before. The pity of it.

Well, it was good to get those things off my mind. Men returned to the earth as if by magic, and I felt very much a part of humanity, otherwise how could I explain my rush to the hospital to save, repair, or

do whatever was necessary to some unfortunate humans caught in an accident?

It was a cold night and the starter of my car refused to work, or at least so I imagined. I looked at the engine. It might be anything, carburettor trouble or the more infantile lack of petrol. It was neither. I had not switched on the ignition. Chuckle, chuckle.

I soon had the car on the road and was praying that I had enough purple in my eye or whatever it is one has to have to see in the darkness. The pedestrians were resting happily between their sheets, but there were still the meandering taxi-cabs to contend with, who swung careering like fussy old ladies all over the road. The traffic lights frustrated me and seemed to linger on red much more than necessary. But I was feeling better. I had walked in the vale of death, with the psalmist David, and had seen many strange things. Pity I hadn't been in Spain, I said to myself, I should have got used to such things as air-raids.

I swung into the gates of the hospital so abruptly that I nearly frightened the porter out of his skin. He jumped aside as delicately as his heavy-weight frame would permit.

I yelled 'Road-hog!' at the astonished man and pulled up short at the entrance. He accepted the apology.

'Mr. Sava, thank God you've arrived,' said a very breathless young man, the house surgeon. I was pleased that he had invoked the Almighty to bring

me to him, and here I was. My mood was lighter, that is until he told me what had happened.

'There has been a dreadful accident,' he said. A group of about ten people were celebrating the departure of one of their friends to France with the Expeditionary Force. And they had naturally felt that the best way to celebrate would be with a few pints of wholesome ale. But, of course, ale is only wholesome in wholesome quantities; but how were they to know that? They drank a couple of barrels dry between them, I should imagine from the description given by the house-surgeon, and, feeling elevated and in good spirits, decided to do an exhibition dance in the middle of the road. Their dance was most expressive. They suggested that Hitler should also be hanged together with his dirty linen on the Siegfried Line. This, of course, they said in pure fun. The party grew merrier and still more merry—and they all danced in the middle of the street.

A lorry swung out of the darkness. A smaller car came to meet it. The dancing people were in between the oncoming cars. The two cars turned to avoid them, skidded, and tore right into the middle of the crowd. All ten were smitten down.

'All killed?' I asked.

'No,' he said, 'that's just the funny thing. No-one was killed, but all of them are dreadfully injured. I gave morphia to those who were in greatest pain, but some of them I dare not touch. I'm simply lost.'

'I'll see them immediately,' I said. 'Where are they?'

They were in the casualty ward which had been prepared for air-raid victims. The room had been empty. We had never referrred to it. It was there for an emergency, and now it was full.

It was a horrible picture. Eight or nine people groaning with agony—all hurt badly. I didn't know where to begin. I just stood still and gazed.

'Their faces are familiar,' I said. 'I know them.'

The house-surgeon started. 'What do you mean?'

'I've seen them before.'

'Where?'

'In my dream.'

The poor man looked at me in astonishment.

Yes, they were all familiar to me. I don't mean I knew them nose for nose or eye for eye; but they were the same ordinary people that I had attended to during the bomb attack. I remembered the same painful, startled look in their faces, the posture of pain as they lay on the stretchers. 'How odd,' I said. 'Dreams do come true—especially if they are unpleasant.'

'You said—a road accident?' I asked, reluctant to tell the assistant the reason for my sudden silence and inactivity.

'Why, yes, Mr. Sava. I've told you. Don't you think we'd better . . . ?'

'Why, of course!'

We worked solidly—myself and the other surgeons

—patching up the injured, mending their bones and attending to their internal injuries. But the dream—the dream—what of the dream?

Why had I dreamt of death—an air-raid—attending to the injured? Was this only a coincidence common to dreams? Was I trying to build a fabric of reality on something that just happened by chance? But was it chance?

Who does not know of the case where the father dreams of his son's death at the exact moment when the son is actually killed? He even hears his voice calling for help. And so it was with me. I had dreamt my nightmare exactly at the moment when the lorry was ploughing its way through the crowd of revellers. They had cried out to me. I had attended them, in my dream, I even remembered their faces? Could a dream also do that?

I am afraid I do not understand the occult sciences, if sciences they be. An unscientific contention permits so much charlatanism, and I am no pretender. I only write what happened—and if some choose not to believe me they can. They themselves will probably have something in their own experience which will make them believe my story. In things like this belief is largely a matter of whether you yourself have actually experienced the phenomenon.

But they were not the victims of an air-raid, I said consolingly to myself.

XVI

TWELVE O'CLOCK: MIDNIGHT

*

My first hour amongst the victims of the road accident was spent in the male casualty ward—prepared, as I mentioned in *the previous hour, for* potential air-raid casualties.

On careful examination I was able to find that four of the young men—in whose honour, it transpired, the whole of the festivities were held—were only superficially wounded. They were stalwart youngsters and the first one I attended was about twenty-two years of age, of upright build, ruddy complexion, and frank blue eyes; in fact, the typical countryman come to town to join His Majesty's forces.

He had a large incision across his face, which I stitched up under local anaesthetic. He was very anxious to know whether he would be rejected from the Air Force on this score. I assured him that a scarred cheek was in no way a handicap to a success-

ful flying career. I also said, a trifle ominously perhaps, that should he gather any more scars during air combat or whatever he did, he should see me after the war was over and I would exercise the magic of plastic surgery and make all scars, blemishes, and disfigurations disappear. The young man was deeply grateful.

His pal, also a youngster of some twenty-two years, limped into the dressing-room. He had been on the outskirts of the crowd dancing in the street and had received nothing more than a severe bump on the knee. This was very painful and I gave him a local anaesthetic whilst I examined him and sewed up a small incision a little above the knee itself.

I told him that he must not take any notice of his limp, as he would find walking uncomfortable for the next three days. His face registered anxiety and I understood.

'Don't worry,' I said; 'I'll give you a certificate saying that the limp will pass in a few days and that you are medically sound and fit otherwise.' He was joining the Tank Corps, and I assured him that the little I knew about tanks led me to suspect that he would have many more bumps and jolts as he rushed over the rugged terrain. In the meanwhile, I wrote him out a certificate. 'There,' I said, 'now you'll be able to spend a few more days with your sweetheart.' But it appears he had no sweetheart. 'Only a wife,' he said whimsically. 'We've been married two years, but it will be good to spend some extra

time with her. I may not be seeing her for a long time.'

I glanced at another two lads who were involved in the accident, and finding them sound and whole except for a few cuts and bruises, I let them go home. They insisted, however on chatting with me and asking me whether the life of a soldier was a hard one.

I couldn't say. My own experiences weren't very pleasant; but then I had been a sailor who had been forced to fight on land, and no sailor likes to do that —and it was a long time ago. War, revolution, flight. . . . I was spinning my yarn, when the sister rushed in.

'I think the man in the next casualty ward needs your immediate attention, Dr. Sava,' she said.

I shook hands with the boys and followed quickly into the next ward.

Here was another victim of the road accident. A man of about forty-eight. He was unconscious, but the moans that came from his mouth told me the whole tale. The periodic distortion of his features, confirmed my fears. He was at death's door.

One cannot go by external appearances alone. They are deceptive. Paleness and slowness of pulse does not always mean death. Death is an atmosphere. It is a strange presence, the black angel beside the bed. It is a weird sensation, almost a premonition, and cannot be adequately described. One can only hint at it.

The first thing to do was to test his pulse. It was

shallow and very slow. Besides giving a confirmation that life was slowly ebbing out of him, it proved that his system had sustained a very serious shock—a surgical traumatic shock we call it—which meant that some of the most vital of the organs were either severed or very badly torn. The situation was therefore desperate, not to say hopeless. The real problem was how to prolong the man's life so as to enable him to stand the shock of examination and the operating theatre.

I ordered an immediate blood transfusion. In that lay our only hope. The two assistants quickly prepared the necessary apparatus, and how grateful was I for the new medical discovery which enabled one to give a blood transfusion on the spot without first having to locate a donor and bring him to the patient.

This new discovery would prove of great importance during war-time, and indeed would be indispensable in field stations and field theatres. It would be responsible for saving many thousands of lives which otherwise would be lost.

As I have said, the ordinary method of blood-transfusion is to find the donor and bring him to the patient.

Blood, as far as we know, is divided into four groups, and a transfusion can only be effected between similar groups. Every hospital has, or had, a list of people willing to give their blood to relieve suffering and prolong life. The blood-donors ran no

risk themselves, and indeed benefited from this periodic bleeding. But while the blood-donors were willing and charming people, it did mean that when they got a call from a hospital they had to leave whatever they were doing and rush over to the hospital. This was clearly a disadvantage, and it meant in some cases delay that, even when the lapse of time was short, resulted in a death.

During this last year scientists have been engaged on the production of demoniac powders, torpedoes, and mines and have used all their ingenuity in perfecting and inventing methods of destruction. A few obscure doctors in Scotland perfected, after many years of experiment, a method of storing blood in powder, in pills, and in a frozen condition.

After months of experiment, they found that blood mixed with one-third of the quantity of a cytrine solution did not coagulate, nor did it 'go bad',—that is, chemically disintegrate. This mixture could be kept in specially constructed refrigerators easily procured from commercial refrigerator companies.

All that happens in this case is that when the blood is needed, the doctor takes out of the refrigerator the necessary blood of the group corresponding to that of his patient and then puts it into a flask, which is in turn immersed in water warmed to a body temperature; then this 'stored' blood is ready for transfusion, and a needle is inserted into the brachial or leg vein and the patient receives his dose of lifegiving liquid. The whole procedure takes about six to eight min-

utes. The apparatus and method are now used in every hospital in the British Isles.

The second method is, I think, more astonishing than the first and is a godsend to field-hospitals, where refrigerators might prove difficult to install.

This 'powder-blood' is obtained by a special process of centrifuging the blood; that is dividing up the liquids and the solids in the blood. The solids contain the most important ingredients—which as yet we cannot manufacture by chemical processes—that is the red and the white corpuscles. There are also iron proteins and various salts and other body-nourishing materials.

The donor's blood is rotated in a huge revolving-drum and the solids, being heavier than the liquids, settle on the bottom of the drum and form a sort of sediment. This sediment is then dried and divided into separate packages containing the various salts, corpuscles, proteins, etc. When a pint or two of blood is needed, these packages are opened and are mixed with a pint or two of fluid—which is nothing more nor less than a saline solution (salt and water) or a sugar solution of the same density as blood. In a minute or two an apparently colourless solution takes on the warm red colour of human blood. The colour itself is brought about by the mixing of certain salts with that very important component of human blood, iron.

I actually used the 'frozen-blood' for this patient of mine. It was handy and I was able to give him a

transfusion of two pints within a few minutes. Colour suffused his cheeks and promised a return to life.

While my assistants were giving him the blood transfusion, I examined him with the greatest care. I found the top part of his body uninjured; but when I examined the abdomen my anxiety deepened into horror as I perceived a small wound—disarming in its size but deadly in its effect. It was a deep wound, I discovered, caused by some sharp object which had penetrated the abdomen and torn the bladder. A deadly mixture of blood and fluid was oozing out. But as if this injury was not enough, I discovered by moving his legs that his pelvic girdle was shattered to pieces. Obviously the lorry had run right over him, and his brittle bones could not stand the strain—indeed nobody's bones could have sustained such a weight.

I did not have to tell my assistants that to remove him to the operating theatre would mean instant death. They saw from my face that I was powerless to do anything.

The blood transfusion, however, revived the stricken man, and he begged me in a weak and painful voice to allow him to see his wife and children. He was in no doubt that the next few minutes would be his last, and I gladly acceded; but I thought it wise to warn his relatives, so I went out of the casualty room and spoke frankly to them.

'There is no point in deceiving you,' I said quietly; 'your husband was very seriously injured, and . . .'

The three of them, the wife and her son and daughter looked dully at each other. They had expected this blow, it seems.

The mother, with her eyes streaming with tears, said to me, 'Doctor, we are a mining family. We can take death easily. Take us in to him. We will be brave.' And then, without another word, this remarkable woman took out a powder-puff from her handbag and powdered her face.

He was not to see them crying, she said, as a gentle reprimand to the children, who immediately braced themselves up—and I led them into the ward.

The father smiled up at them and they smiled in return. They did not speak. They held his hand and watched him die without saying a word. But there was love and confidence in their eyes—I might almost say there was religion, or rather faith. That was beautiful and touching.

'We are a mining family,' the wife repeated when at last I managed to persuade her to leave her husband's body. 'Death is always with us,' she muttered as she went out. 'God's will be done.'

I turned away. My eyes were full of tears. Some heroism goes unrewarded. That is reason enough perhaps why there should be the Kingdom of Heaven. Only God could do justice to such a brave and noble soul.

XVII

ONE O'CLOCK: MORNING

*

The drama that had been played before my eyes and in which I was a secondary actor did not come to its climax with the death of *the old miner*. In a good play situations are so ordered that climaxes come at the end, but life is indiscriminate and does not always observe the niceties of the stage. Indeed, the climax frequently comes in the very beginning and subsequent action becomes anti-climax and even comedy. Life is as fickle and unpredictable as the weather, and although it absorbs us and we feel important as film stars whilst we take part in its drama, once the drama has left us we realize that we were only the prey of circumstance.

My nerves were thoroughly worn out by the case I had just attended. The sadness of defeat was upon me and I longed for silence and rest—but, to continue the theatrical metaphor, the curtain had only gone down on the first act; I had to participate in the second soon.

The scenery remained the same. There were the nurses in white uniforms; the white furniture; the spotless cleanliness of the hospital; the faint odour of carbolic. Some of the actors of the first act remained —the theatre sisters, the anaesthetist, and the two assistants. The principal, however, had not received her call. She was lying in the female casualty department.

But there were some minor actresses in this drama to attend to. They had suffered injuries from the motor accident—but they had only a small role to play subsequently, I am glad to say, in the dressing-station. They came on and said their few lines—that is let me glance at their bumped elbows, black-eyes, and bruises—and then bowed themselves off stage.

Three of the four women were dealt with. When I asked for the fourth I was told she was waiting for me in the casualty ward, too hurt to come on of her own accord. She was the heroine of this drama, a drama no actress, however great, could have played, for she had to play before the greatest tragedian of all time—Death.

She was a young woman, small and pretty, with natural fair hair. I should say she was about twenty-four years of age. I learnt that she had been married some eighteen months before and that her husband had not been present at the scene of the accident. However, there was no time to acquaint myself with private details; one glance at her showed the gravity of her situation.

She was not unconscious, but her pulse and respiration were slowly ebbing away. I could also see that she had lost a great deal of blood, so the first thing was to order blood transfusion, the one hope in a case like this.

Her slight recovery after the blood transfusion allowed me to make a closer examination. I had still within me the memory of the poor man whom I had attended and the grave discovery I had made—so, as I bent to examine the unfortunate girl, I shuddered and offered up a silent prayer.

She was an expectant mother. The child had no more than two or three weeks to go before being born, and involuntarily my stethoscope sought to capture some sign of life from the small unborn being.

A smile came over the nurse's face as I nodded my head. There were distinct throbs of the little turbine, and I knew that another heart besides the mother's was doing its work. The tiny little drum-beats seemed so pathetic and unreal, unaware of the world outside the warmth and love of its mother.

How great now was my responsibility! I had not one life to save, but two. But my hopes were soon to be shattered; further examination revealed terrible injuries. I have no reason to heighten the drama—or 'cook' the truth—but the injuries I found in the woman were very similar to the ones I had found in my previous patient. In her case, however, there was no deep penetrating wound in the bladder, but her

whole pelvic girdle was smashed, and to add to this complication her right leg was broken in two places and the fractures were protruding through the flesh and the skin.

I looked around me as if I expected some miracle to happen, or some wonderful surgeon to enter the room who could mend her pelvic girdle and correct her fractures without causing her any shock. It was idle wishful-thinking. My assistants gazed with open-mouthed horror.

'Well,' I asked, 'what are we to do? Are we to try to save both of them—and so risk losing both—or try to save one, and which one?'

None of them dared to reply. I myself was not prepared to take the responsibility. I was not God, but I knew deep down in my heart that one of them would have to be sacrificed.

'Very well then, let us call the gynaecologist. He might suggest a way out of the difficulty,' I said hopefully, still trying to delude myself that we would be able to save both the mother and the child.

The gynaecologist, after very little thought, came to the same conclusion, but he also sought to avoid any direct responsibility one way or another.

'Call the physician,' he suggested. 'He might be able to help us.'

The doctor made a careful examination. We knew that all hopes were false even before he started, but if only to satisfy our consciences we let him make his pronouncement.

'I'm afraid . . .' he said.

'Exactly,' I replied. 'I'm afraid of starting a Caesarean operation whilst the mother is still alive.'

'It would certainly kill her,' the gynaecologist said —just, I suspect, for the sake of saying something to break the tense atmosphere.

'Yet if we do what we can for her, she might survive,' I went on. 'I mean we can wait. . . .'

A brilliant suggestion! I said to myself as soon as I had stopped speaking. Brilliant. Oh yes, we could wait, but would life attend our waiting? And yet there was nothing else I could say—and certainly nothing else anyone could do for the mother and her unborn baby.

After all, mistakes do happen. Even the best surgeons make mistakes. Life has its own laws and I have known people given up by medical science make an astonishing recovery. It was this frail chance —this one hope in a million—that kept us going. If she was able to survive her injuries, we might slowly, very slowly patch her up without an operation for some days and then when she got stronger, we could. . . .

We talked and talked. We could do so many things if only her strength would hold out. If only. . . . But we did more than talk; we brought in all the life-giving instruments that we knew of. Blood transfusion was repeated every few minutes, heart stimulants were given her, oxygen was pumped into her

lungs in an attempt to purify her blood and stimulate her circulation.

Yes, we went on being hopeful right on to the end, and when she died we all pretended that we were surprised, but we really felt weak and upbraided our learning that we did not know more of the science of life.

We had two stethoscopes, one on the mother's heart and the other on her abdomen where her child nestled. The assistant indicated by raising his stethoscope that the mother's heart had stopped beating, but I forced a weak smile on my face and said, 'The child lives.' Excitedly the others took the stethescope from me and listened. Dop . . . dop . . . dop. . . . Yes, it was beating. It was alive.

Without a word, silent as ghosts, we took our instruments, which had been carefully prepared even while the mother was alive, and with quick movements we opened the mother's abdomen and delivered out of her lifeless womb a small live creature that had all the markings of man. And it was then that we forgot the mother. She was a corpse, beyond our skill. It was the child that demanded life—and it was to the child that we devoted the next frantic hours.

We held in our hands the prematurely born infant. We held it up as a symbol of life in the midst of death, and I wondered rather meekly what its destiny would be. Born in such macabre circumstances, would he turn into a soldier, or a statesman, or the Messiah of eternal peace?

But this was no time for thoughts and speculations. He would be what his destiny had already planned. He might be the scourge of mankind or he might be its saviour from war or pestilence. That did not matter. We had one duty before us and that was to guarantee him life.

He was put in warm cotton-wool, brandy was given to him, his small back gently massaged and we waited anxiously for him to cry; we waited for that piercing shriek which would open his lungs and give him the precious air on which he, small creature of the planet Earth, would hereafter live.

We did not think of the fact that we were bringing him into the world an orphan. Life was more important than even a mother. We had closed our eyes to the future, which no man of us can read; we tried only to give him air and comfort. But he would have none of these things. After twenty minutes he died. He went to join his mother in Limbo or Heaven.

He must have borne some injury which we could not find. Protected as he was in his mother's womb, and undamaged as he seemed to our expert eyes, the shock which had torn through his mother's heart must have affected his.

He had come through the shadow of Death and had returned to it. Better, perhaps, that it should be so, and happier for him than to be the next unknown warrior in the next war.

I spoke to the father and tried to console him as best I could, and despite his tears and his great love

for his wife, he was brave enough to say that it was better for both of them to be dead. The girl would certainly have been a cripple all her life, and as for the child—who can say what effect the accident would have had on his mind? Supposing that the mother had died and he had lived, what would have happened to him? The father had no relatives; he had to earn his own living, and would have been compelled under these circumstances, to send the child to an orphanage. No, it would have been a strange world for the child without maternal love. In this case, perhaps, destiny was really kind. I, the surgeon, the doctor, the gynaecologist, and the father—we all say so.

XVIII

TWO O'CLOCK: MORNING

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The death of the mother and her child left me in a very shaken condition. I was surprised at myself. Had I not—I asked myself—seen death before and in as tragic circumstances? I was tired, I said. My nerves had been upset by the past twelve hours. Everything and anything had happened to me. I had nearly caused death myself when I braked in the blackout and knocked down a man, and I had seen death twice—no, three times; but I was a scientist and I could look at death dispassionately. What was it after all? A negation of life—that is, no movement, no thought, no sensations, no appreciation, no feeling for the beautiful and creative. That was death. It was merely change. It was not necessarily fearful. It belonged to the logical order of the universe. For did not even the stars die? To me the star analogy is so poignant and full of meaning. Consider, I said, consider. There is a star. It is millions and trillions of miles away—so far in fact that

we cannot count it in terms of space, but only in terms of 'light-years'—that is, the speed of light. We think it exists because we see the light—and yet, considering that the light we see has perhaps been travelling for the last thousand years before it reached our eyes, can we be sure that what we see is not merely a reflection of that which was alive and is no more? Are we not, then, like those stars? We live and we shine, and after we have died the light still goes on, because the mere fact that we have lived has created the light. So too perhaps with civilizations.

I have a stupid habit of thinking of civilizations when I am in bed and should be asleep. But the harassing details of the past day came upon me and disturbed me. Try as I would I could not drive them away. I knew only one thing that would. Sociology.

Now I am no sociologist. It takes me most of my time to be a surgeon. But I am after all alive, and live in the company of men, and therefore feel entitled to think about men's actions and society besides just worrying about their aches and pains.

Of course, I don't really worry. I know very well that nothing I ever do will ever help to make the history of the world take a different and more humane turn, although I can alleviate pain and perhaps in my own particular circle I can make a few wrongs into rights. That's enough for me as a sociologist.

I know that scientists can make a world better—materially that is—and perhaps, as a result of that,

even spiritually more lofty, but in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred I am disappointed. Lister, say I, gave us anaesthetics. That was wonderful. He was a hero. But who will give us peace? Bessemer gave us a new process of manufacturing steel—or at least he gave the process in the first place to the Germans. Result? The Franco-Prussian war of 1870. Also a hero—if you think in terms of material progress. After the war was over, the Germans hastened to share their secret with the French. But who will give us peace? Perhaps soon, perhaps not so soon, a man will discover the cure for cancer. He will be a hero too. He will make life easier and better for thousands upon thousands. But who, I say, will give us peace?

Faraday, Leonardo da Vinci, Galileo, Pasteur, Mendeleieff, Franklin, and hundreds of other chemists, scientists, mathematicians, have made us materially happy and have helped us to solve many of our spiritual problems. But with their discoveries they brought insecurity. Old beliefs went and new beliefs came in; but those new beliefs were not complete. Science is for ever discovering; no single thing can be static. To-day gold is an element, to-morrow it may be a compound! Yesterday Heaven was somewhere high up in the sky; to-day aeroplanes fly in the stratosphere, but so far are not reported to have found 'Heaven'. To-morrow they may—when space and time are conquered.

Our morality too has changed. What was bad yesterday appears to be quite innocent to-day—and

vice versa. The old gods have tumbled down and we are striving to replace them with new ones. We are setting new values on things. We are submitting to tyranny for the sake of 'the greater good'. We are sometimes walking backwards to reach our goals. We are forcing people to stand on their hands and are asking them to swallow reforms—again for the 'greater good'. We are seeing things as through a glass darkly.

But the eternal things remain eternal. Goodness and humanity remain. Brotherhood and decency and simplicity are still good in themselves. The love of home and freedom, the capacity for self-sacrifice—these things remain laudable in a world of changing values.

The end of the war will bring many changes. May it bring them with justice. We will fight hard, and perhaps even bloodily, against what we consider the 'wrong way'. We have been brought up to hate tyranny, and as long as history remembers we have fought against it, against the petty tyrants—so much so that even our bureaucracy has a quality to be found in no other country.

The future throws no shadow on to the present, but the present certainly foreshadows what is to come. This most amazing of amazing wars started with humanity—at least from our side. I have already described it as a scientific war. We have entered it to rid the world and ourselves of a pest, a virulence which has seized some men's hearts. But let us re-

member that and let us continue the war with the same humanity as we began it.

Bad conditions and economic maladjustment brought a great despair to men. For the sake of a meal and better conditions they were willing to barter away a life of freedom and justice and submit to the rule of a bloodthirsty tyrant. He gave them their bread and circuses and in return they called themselves his slaves.

Let us not judge them too harshly. They were cheated by fair promises; they were bullied into bullying and tortured into acquiescence; many of their finer spirits died in order to keep their country civilized—but to no immediate purpose.

But the fruits of tyranny are death. In the same way as a surgeon postpones an operation if he thinks one can be avoided by different treatment, so the peaceful peoples of the world sought by negotiation and compromise to bring the tyrants to a reasonable and conciliatory attitude. They failed.

I have no need to labour the point. The war-guilt rests on other shoulders than ours. If at times we were wrong and ungenerous, as at Versailles, we were prepared to make amends. We were prepared to make reparations—we who had won a Pyrrhic victory—simply because we knew that in some ways we were unjust. How else could we have been? No peace-treaty is ever perfect. It invariably gets adjusted; in times past the usual method of adjustment was for the vanquished to grow sufficiently strong

again to challenge the victors. This we sought to avoid. We made peace-treaties, we built a League of Nations, we offered our financial resources; we signed pacts of non-aggression; we disarmed; we even put aside pride and wore the weeds of humility —for we were strong enough to do even that. We were prepared to plead; our Prime Minister went as a suppliant for peace. The whole record of our last twenty years shows an earnest striving for peace. On that question the whole country was united. And now in the face of war, our whole country is united too. The extremists of the right and the left are discredited. It will be many years before even the gullible will be prepared to swallow their theories.

What of war aims? What of the new world that is bound to rise on the ashes of the old?

As I tossed on my pillow unable to get to sleep I thought of this problem.

One thing was certain, that the first war aim was to win the war, a fact frequently forgotten by well-intentioned but impractical people. That will remain the chief duty of the armed forces and the strategists who control them. And for a successful prosecution of the war these strategists must receive the full support not only of the governmental departments but also of the civil population. The so-called 'totalitarian war' which we have been warned against has been released with all its fury against France, and for the present France is defeated. But what the ultimate fate of the Blitzkrieg will be we

need not be in doubt; it is one thing to overcome an army, and quite another to invade an island whose people are the masters of the seas.

Then the first aim is to win the war. Good, that will be done. We are sure of that. He who fights first doesn't smile last.

Now, the peace? Shades of President Wilson, what shall it be? Echo answers it must be a just peace. When the statesmen of the world leave the conference let not one of them say: 'Somwhere I hear a child weeping.' No dragon's teeth this time. It will not be a perfect peace—after the manner of angels; it will be a very human peace. Yes, a very human peace. This word human—if you think about it—is more beautiful than even the words 'godly' or 'heavenly'.

It must be a peace of give and take; not 'you give and I take'. There must be no more talk of 'reparations'. Those who know the world of money realize what a fiction currency is, and in any case the victors have no right to condemn unborn generations to a 'reparation slavery'—not that they could even if they would, because they would get bilked.

It ought, I think, to be more in the nature of a business conference. A sort of getting together of business competitors, a business truce, shall we say, in which the producers of, say, margarine have decided that after many years of economic warfare the best thing they can do for their industries and the people employed by them is to amalgamate their business interests and still preserve their national

business methods and so forth. In other words a share-out of markets and raw materials. All this would have been possible even before the war—had the warmongers wanted it and had they not spent their money on armaments but on the colonial produce and wealth which the democracies were offering them at world market prices.

But I'm a surgeon and not an economist, and perhaps it isn't for me to say how these things should be organized. And yet why not? I might as well throw my opinion in the scales of what I consider to be world justice.

I know one thing, however, and that is that, as far as we are concerned, we shall offer the best and the fairest terms. They will not be utopian, nor will they be so very pan-federal-Europe-and-all-our-difficulties-are-solved variety. We shall plan soberly—but we shall be under no illusion that many of our most cherished schemes won't fail. We shall merely replan and plan again.

Then how are we to avoid war in the future? Are we to limit arms? Are we to make an international police? Where does the League of Nations come in? Is there to be free self-determination of nations?

These are intriguing questions, and if I attempt to answer them, I do so in all humbleness. My answers will be interesting to me at all events, if to no-one else—for I shall be able to see how many of my personal aspirations will come true when the years themselves disclose their secrets.

How are we to avoid war in the future? The glib answer is to remove the causes of war. And what are the causes of war? There are economic causes, and there are 'mental' causes. The economic ones must be solved first—otherwise the 'mental' causes will have an excellent case. Thus, say the militarists, you are cold and hungry and the other fellow has everything—why, the solution is obvious; go to war and get what he has; then you will be prosperous and mighty. The war mentality is bred on economic disaffection. Remove the one and you have removed the other. Also there must be some spiritual drilling. Peace should be desired for its own sake. It must be shown profitable to all who participate in it. And if that is so, then humanity—German, Chinese, Russian, of whatever nation—will realize that war is brigandage and that to strike at other people's territories and governments is the act of outlaws.

Arms, of course, must be limited. That is they should be limited all round, if not completely abolished. As acts of good faith, each government should invite an international commission each year to inspect its arsenals and its factories. Any infringement of this regulation would mean economic readjustment, and a nation which was spending its money on armaments would not be allowed to borrow or to export more of its goods than it did under its quota when it obeyed the international convention not to re-arm.

The League as the League of Nations is dead. Or

perhaps more truthfully one would say it lives in the highest aspirations of the human race. As an idealist's conception it is excellent, as a practical one it is doomed to failure. More practical guarantees are necessary than those of moral or even economic sanctions. That is for the statesmen of the world to work out, and nations must be willing to sacrifice a certain amount of their national sovereignty to achieve these ends, otherwise each nation will strive for its own betterment regardless of any other and the same impasse will be reached before many years are out.

There must, however, be complete freedom for every nation to decide on the form of government it wishes to adopt. Political systems will be greatly modified if economic collaboration is achieved with justice. Fascism—and Communism, for that matter—would not have been possible had democrats always been faithful to democracy and had they urged on their respective governments the need for economic collaboration. It must be recognized once and for all that some nations are rich in natural resources, in technical skill, and in culture and it should be the duty—yes, the duty—of the powerful and the rich to assist their neighbours. This is not only Christianity, but also practical politics. Nothing can be achieved without co-operation, and if there is one discontented nation in Europe the cauldrons of war will ever be bubbling.

But above all there is one thing most necessary, and that is that democracy should cease putting its

light under a bushel. That it should proclaim itself the living force that it is, for, whatever shortcomings and paradoxes it has, it has one advantage over every other human system—it preaches the right of freedom and the development of free individuals, it negates and fights against tyranny, it seeks to give to all men according to their ability, and, if the Marxists will pardon me, it will also in the future seek to give to each nation according to its need.

XIX

THREE O'CLOCK: MORNING

*

Tired as I was, sleep refused to come. A political argument with oneself is one of the most exhausting things I know. I smiled as I lay on my pillow at the great expenditure of Salic wit which I had poured out in argument, some of the fine phrases which I promised myself I should incorporate into an article when I woke up; but all these things I clean forgot as memories and recollections came crowding into my head.

A weird time is three o'clock when one can't get to sleep. It is an exasperating hour—the middle of the night—far more terrifying I think than twelve o'clock, when graveyards are supposed to yawn and give up their dead. I personally think that if I were a ghost I would not waste my time haunting people at twelve. Three o'clock is the time when the brain is at its lowest ebb and the nerves are on edge in a frantic endeavour to get to sleep. The silence becomes positively oppressive, so that you are tempted to address it—shout at it and attempt to scare yourself stiff;

anything, even a nightmare, is better than staying awake and playing about with ridiculous thoughts that keep creeping into the brain. For instance, you are suddenly amused by the most ordinary things, things that in broad daylight are not the least bit funny. People's faces, for instance, a man with a nose that looked like a Goya caricature who came into the dressing-room. He is simply uproariously funny. The simpering tone of a nurse—she sounds as if she was always talking to a kitten. Then my own face. That amuses me too. Everything amuses and puzzles in the darkness. The creaks of the bed become exaggerated. The wind rattling the windowpane becomes personified. One remembers one's childhood fear that someone is lurking under one's bed and one is half-tempted to get out of bed and see. Then you begin to worry. Have you turned out all the lights? The gas? Extinguished your cigarette in the drawing-room? Then bills. You are amused at them. That is the only time bills seem really funny. You pretend that you are cosy and protected from the world. Your back itches. The pillows grow stiff and hard as rock. The clock-ticks drive you to a fury. You don't know what to do. You think and think and think....

What does it matter, now, I asked myself. Why should I control my thoughts? Let them wander where they will, let them pasture in Utopias or in the backwashes of memory where everything is faint and coloured in a delicate pink....

Of course, the world must be a far better place to live in after the war. That is the most important war aim. Everybody will want that, and if everybody wants it why shouldn't it be? That's logic. Logic of the three o'clock variety. Everything changes—even the old world. How many changes haven't you seen in your short life? What a melting-pot this century has been!

Thirty years ago I was six years old. That's another way of saying I was six. Six years of life! Wonderful, beautiful, careless life! I am born (why not the present when you think?) in a small country house, lost somewhere in the Caucasian plains near a big river. Very nice to be born near a big river, especially as it runs right through the garden. And there behind the river are the mountains. Father proudly tells me that the Caucasian Mountains are higher than the Alps and far more interesting. Two hundred odd races live there, he says. They have long knives which they carry in their silver scabbards. They have long whiskers and long coats and eat mutton fried on their long daggers. Everything is long. Kasbek, the mountain is long. My father is long.

I am the fourth of six children. I have two brothers and one sister older than I am and also two sisters junior to me. I'm in a very good position, because my mother considers that I am much younger than my elder brothers and sister and yet sufficiently advanced to be senior to my other sisters. An excellent position. I benefit on both sides,

Here there is peace; not that I understand anything but peace, because at six you don't think of anything else except getting up early and hating to go to bed and playing about and climbing trees or going for walks. There is peace in our family of eight. My father is an officer, a retired officer, and can tell wonderful tales, as any self-respecting father should. He is an ideal father. He is on a pension and derives a comfortable income from his small estate.

My elder brother is home on his holidays. He is at the Military Academy learning to be an artillery officer. He is only twelve, but swanks about in his 'Junker' uniform as if he were a lieutenant. I call him 'lieutenant' because he likes it He thinks I am impressed, and I am really. I like his buttons.

The rest of the family—that is my brothers and sisters—are studying at a local private school. Only gentle people go to this school, which is very odd, because I am not always very gentle. However, I am too young to understand these fine differences and feel somehow that I would like to go to the Government school for peasant children. They seem to have much more fun, but they get beaten a lot. I also get beaten when I play jokes on the governess. We all play jokes on her, but I always get beaten because I'm not quick enough to escape her vengeance. The governess always threatens to leave our *famille affreuse*, as she calls it, but she always stays. She has been with us for years and years and never seems to get worn

out. I think that she really loves us, although heaven only knows why she should.

Everything goes on beautifully in the best of worlds, when one evening my father summons me to his study. I am just going in to have supper when he comes into the dining-room: 'George, I want you.' My brothers and sisters snigger. They know what that summons means. I have been caught out, and now my father is going to give me my well-deserved punishment for blacking young Igor's eye—the little sneak. I tremble. My father has a heavy hand and my seat is young and consequently soft. However, I imagine myself a hero and know what an impression I am going to make on my own unsympathetic family if I appear without any tears after the licking.

I enter the study timidly. My father tells me to sit down. That's strange, I think. Perhaps I am going to be lectured before I am beaten. I hate lectures. I'd much rather be beaten than talked to and told that I'm a dishonourable little brat because I promised never to black little Igor's eye again. No use remonstrating and pretending that he fell on my fist. Father knows sufficient about the laws of gravity not to believe that.

But no—it isn't a lecture.

'George,' he says, 'you're not a baby.' I smile appreciatively.

'You can already ride and shoot and I hear you fight quite well, and, although I don't want to encourage you as a pugilist, I think you are old enough

to listen to what I have to say.' Thus my father captures my attention and I fix my eyes on his bushy whiskers and listen.

'I'm going to tell you something about your family and who they are. We are Bulgarians. Your grandfather emigrated—that is he ran away from Bulgaria many years ago——'

'Why did he run away?' I ask simply, not feeling it right that a relative of mine should have done such a thing.

'Well, it happened like this,' my father explains. 'His father—your great-grandfather—was a wealthy landowner in Macedonia—a country you probably have never heard of.'

'Oh, yes, I have,' I challenge. 'It's near Greece— I read about Alexander of Macedon.'

'That's right. Now this Bulgarian province has been in the hands of different barbarians for hundreds of years—but they couldn't drive out the Bulgarians. Your great-grandfather was mayor of the largest town and was a very respected man because he and his family never bowed down to the Turks who had conquered the country and who ruled it cruelly. In fact, he was one of the instigators and leaders of the revolution against the Turks who had sat upon Bulgaria for five hundred years and had sent their pashas and viziers to gather tribute from them. Well the French Revolution and Napoleon, who led the wars of liberation in Italy, helped to bring the idea of nationality to us Bulgarians, and my

grandfather—that is your great-grandfather—decided to lead a handful of determined men against the oppressive Turks. Together with his brother, he proclaimed a revolt and took his followers—a mere handful of three hundred men—into the mountains. From there he waged a guerrilla war against the heathens. But the Turks had a large army, and my grandfather, who had more bravery than wisdom, decided to give battle with his small army against the Sultan's hordes. It was a disaster and nearly all of grandfather's army was massacred. He himself escaped after many hazards—but the Turks threatened to burn down every house in the province and to kill every male unless grandfather surrendered to them.'

'And did he?' I ask, awed by the doughty warrior's deeds.

'Of course he did,' my father says a little impatiently. 'Listen. He surrendered to them and saved the province from destruction. He suffered a frightful death, and when one day you read the history of your native race you will find his name amongst the heroes who fought for their country's liberty.'

I nod my head.

'My father was quite young at the time,' my father continues, 'and he managed, together with his sister and your grandmother, to escape from Macedonia. They were helped, I admit, by some friendly Turks —which goes to show that there is chivalry in all races, and it was only the Sultan who stirred up

hatred against us Bulgarians because he wanted our tribute. Well, they reached Rumania and then finally came to hospitable Russia, who accepted them as her brothers. Through the kind offices of friends, when I reached the age I went to the Engineering Academy at Moscow and obtained a commission and fought with the Russian armies in the Russo-Turkish War, when I had the pleasure of seeing the Turkish fortress of Plevna fall before the combined armies of Russia and her Bulgarian allies. I rose to be a staff officer and found myself in a position to marry. Now, your mother is a Russian and belongs to one of the oldest families, being the niece of the revered and powerful Prince Mikloman Miklomanovitch. Her family lived in the province of Samarkand, which they held by the Tsar's mandate. I met your mother when I was on a military tour of the province, and we fell in love despite the opposition of her old uncle, who thought that she should have married someone more important. . . .'

That stings me a little. I had always considered my father important. But my father forestalls any interruption on my part.

'However, your mother loved me and agreed to marry me despite her uncle's opposition. He in revenge refused to recognize my existence and forgot all about us. I was only a humble Bulgarian and had to live on my staff-captain's money, whilst he was the all-powerful Prince. However, that did not matter, and although he did not visit us or even so much as

write, we knew that he followed our family fortunes very carefully and noted every new son that was born to us. A friend of his used to come down periodically and pretend that he was inquiring about your mother's health. We learnt from this self-same friend that the Prince had married but had no children, and yesterday, to my great surprise, he sent his bailiff to me with a letter.'

My father produces the letter and looks at it gravely for a while.

'He wants someone to pass on his estates to, and he is asking us to supply him with an heir. Naturally, he writes, he wants someone who is very young, so that he would not miss his father and mother and would be willing to go to live with him on his estate. He suggests you, George.'

'No, no,' I say. I am terrified. I have seen enough of my ancestors in their worn gilt frames hanging up in my father's study not to want to join them. They look a pack of wild and dangerous Mongols with fur caps and murderous expressions on their faces. 'No,' I yell. 'No! No! No!'

And that is that, or nearly so. I hear nothing more about the matter—for a month. In fact just when I have forgotten about it, I am summoned again to my father's study.

This time he speaks more sternly—although somehow I feel that he is very upset.

He tells me that he has reconsidered my uncle's offer, and that although at first he was not prepared

to send me to him, preferring to educate me as best he could and give me the best chance in the world he could, he has been talking it over with my mother and their friends and they all feel that it would be best.

And so it is that my family decides to send me to the wilds of Turkistan, a legendary and forgotten place where Jenghiz Khan and Tamerlane once held court. To console me I am told that I shall be rich and shall inherit my uncle's title. I am given three days in which to pack and say my good-byes.

I do not say anything. I have been brought up to obey. My father says that it is best for me and all I can do is to agree. He tries hard to pretend that he is very happy at this good stroke of fortune and refuses to pay any attention to the large tears that are falling from my eyes.

I was not consulted. I was told that I would become a nobleman and would be rich and happy. But I was happy as I was, happy with my toys and my brothers and sisters. I wasn't interested in being any kind of nobleman, even the best kind. What I wanted was to be happy my own way. But that was not to be.

That was my first sleepless night—in which the darkness was so silent and solutionless and in which I felt small and miserable and lamented that I had been deceived. I said no-one loved me and felt my heart bleed inside me. But I had been trained to obey and I obeyed.

XX

FOUR O'CLOCK: MORNING

*

My head was splitting from pain and I could find no rest. I heard the four strokes of a clock somewhere, but I could not place it. I did not know whether it was the striking of a clock somewhere in the distances of my childhood, or in the conscious present. I was not sure whether I was asleep or whether I was living back in the memory of time. . . .

So they were going to send me to Samarkand, the Golden City of the Tartars, a place of many coloured tents, where the most exquisite carpets in the world are made and where men relieve the monotony of their existence by vendetta and sport. Samarkand was the outpost of the empire, the heart of Turkistan, a district arid and fertile in spots. When Allah sent rain, there was grass for the sheep—but when the hot tundra winds blew over the spaces, they left nothing but red sand.

How well I remember that journey to Samarkand!

How well I remember my terror and sadness at having to leave my family. But the decision had been made. I was leaving the next day. Perhaps my father accelerated my journey on purpose. He knew that leave-taking would be hard, and the quicker it was over and done with the better.

I remember my tearful surprise when I saw that no-one in the family was pleased to see me go. Even my brothers were tearful. Just think of it! My own brothers were sorry that I had to go! And why were they sorry? Hadn't I bashed their noses and made them bleed many a time? For although I was younger and smaller I had a knack of dodging my aggressor and hitting him square on the nose and running away for all I was worth. The running away I explained as being a part of the excellent strategem of running away to fight another day. But it appeared that I would never hit my brothers on the nose again. We had a strange presentiment that we would never meet again. Fortunately, that presentiment did not come true.

My mother and my sisters embraced me passionately. They blessed me innumerable times and kept on filling my hamper with delicious patties and drinks until I had more food on my journey than an armed battalion of soldiers. My mother, who was a good Orthodox, gave me a tiny ikon of the Virgin and told me to keep it before me and pray to the Holy Mother when in danger or temptation. My father was gruff, but he also was suffering. Even in a

large brood, I suppose, it is difficult to lose one born and bred of your own blood.

I stared dry eyed at my home as they put me on horseback, but when I saw my mother weeping I began to cry. I began to cry softly and tried not to show my tears to my brothers, but they were weeping also, and when finally the cavalcade did move off, all I could realize through the haze of tears was a forest of arms waving me good-bye and some voices telling me that they would be visiting me soon. But Samarkand was not a trip to Brighton. I did not see my parents again for over two years.

The journey—the initial part of it most certainly—was made at a funeral pace. The moment we had crossed the Caspian Sea to Krasnovodsk I was again taken on horseback and the most difficult part of the journey to Samarkand began. There was no road to the city from the seaport on the Caspian at which we had landed. There were caravan tracks which, had I known my history at that time, would have filled me with a sense of awe and admiration. These very tracks had served for centuries, and many generations of merchants must have travelled along them with their camels and dromedaries laden with carpets and silks. But I was too young to appreciate these historical niceties, and in any case, some places are best left in a history book. To relive the life and to revisit the places is frequently a disappointment—if not a positive bore. Here there was sand, just sand, for as far as the eye could see. In the end you stopped

noticing it—but it was still there, either blowing about and getting in your eyes and ears or spoiling your food and scratching your tongue. It was no journey for a child of eight years, but the escort of ten people with Gregory at their head did their best to make me comfortable.

Gregory was my uncle's bailiff, and he was as tender as a mother to me on that journey. When we rested, he wrapped me up in blankets. When we fed, he gave me the best and softest pieces of meat and ate the bones himself—that is he gnawed them.

Whenever the sand under our feet grew harder we were able to proceed at a fairly good pace, but only when we approached the famous well of Qoyun Quyu, did a few isolated saksaul trees appear. Otherwise the route was bare of any other flora. This surprised me a little. I had come from one of the richest districts in the world. The Caucasian valleys and the northern plain were equalled only by the black-earth region itself. Vines and fruit trees—peach, apricot and cherry—and broad meadow pasture had been my everyday scene, and naturally I was very curious at this aridity but Gregory—despite his Russian name, he was a Mohammedan—said that Allah was displeased with the massacres of Jenghiz Khan and had sent an eternal drought upon the land through which the route to Samarkand lay. I did not question the geographical veracity of this statement.

But Allah who had sent a drought upon this land was merciful enough to preserve a few small animals.

They apparently could graze on the sparse tough grass of the desert steppes, and these beautiful, coloured, and shy-eyed gazelles frequently crossed our path. I was enamoured with the creatures and asked Gregory to get me one as a pet, but the gazelles were swifter than our horses and before Gregory could even approach one with his lasso they had disappeared in a cloud of dust, their thin little legs bouncing away to the horizon.

One of the escort, a shaggy and evil-smelling Tartar, raised his rifle to shoot at one of the gazelles. In his simple mind, he imagined that when I said I wanted a gazelle, I wanted it dead or alive. Before I was able to scream at him to stop he fired. My heart leapt up inside me. I wrenched the reins out of Gregory's hand and drove right over to the man. 'How dare you,' I shouted, 'how dare you try to kill one of Allah's creatures?' I was moved by the story Gregory had told me.

The shot happily went wild, and Gregory, who was anxious to please me, knowing perhaps that one day I would become his master, ordered the escort not to fire their rifles at the gazelles. The escort protested a little, but Gregory was firm; and I was glad that God had given the gazelles such swift little feet.

I do not remember how long the journey took. It was certainly not less than ten days. The first part of the journey was comparatively tranquil, but during the last three days of it nothing seemed to go right. We missed our well—that is we strayed wide of the

last watering-place and for the next three days we wandered about looking for water. Luckily our own supplies just held out with careful rationing, but the horses suffered a great deal of thirst, as we could not spare much of the precious liquid. To add to our dilemma, on the seventh day a gentle desert wind began to blow. It was friendly and caressing and was cool during the day and slightly warmer at night, but Gregory, who knew the significance of this wind, made us pitch tent and wait for what he called the Buran. What a typhoon is to the South Sea islands and a hurricane to the North Americas, so the Buran is to that country; it is the dread sandstorm of Turkistan. It is a merciless, sweeping wind, flaying the unprotected like a whip.

We had just crossed the river Amu Darya when this gentle wind began blowing, softly at first, as I have already explained, and then gathering in intensity—so much so that the sand began to choke the riders despite their heavy cloaks and wool face mufflers. Suddenly the sand ceased coming in grains and began to come in blobs. Apparently the fierce wind had spun the sand together into a mass and this mass was itself gathering size like a snowball and was bearing down upon us. Gregory told me afterwards that had one of them hit us on the head we would have woken up in paradise.

Naturally I was terrified, and were it not for Gregory's strong arm around me and the tales he told me throughout that long blizzard, I should have

howled with terror. As it was the storm cleared up after the night—at midday next morning to be precise—and we continued our journey.

It was not surprising that my enthusiasm for my new home—or should I really say my curiosity to see it—waned a great deal, and I was rather indifferent when Gregory told me that we were approaching the outskirts of Samarkand itself. What he called outskirts were still thirty miles away, but I did not argue, and when my uncle's castle came into sight I was greatly relieved, but not exactly thrilled.

This was no medieval castle with turrets and high battlements perched on a forgotten crag in the Carpathians or the Black Forest. Of these I had read in Hans Andersen and Grimm. It was a large straggling building made of local stone and carved in a peculiar way. However, as I have already said, I wasn't very curious about it and left its exploration to another time.

As soon as we rode into the gates my uncle was apparently notified of my arrival and he came out to greet me. He patted me on my head and said I was welcome. But otherwise the rest of his greeting was most peculiar. It is worth describing in full.

He himself was a handsome, impressive-looking man of about sixty. He was six feet five inches tall, a giant, and his honest, sunburned face inspired confidence and respect. But I was already very prejudiced against him. After all, wasn't he the man who had taken me away from my family, my mother and

father and brothers and sister, my garden, my toys, my friends. And for what purpose? Merely for the insignificant need of an heir. I was planted in his wretched sandy Turkistan, where the winds came soft and turned out to be roaring monsters, where the men smelt of melted mutton-fat. . . .

Anyway, the immediate dislike seemed to be mutual. He said that I was quite a nice boy but my face was very vulgar and Bulgarian. I answered by saying that my face was my own property, that it suited me, and that I personally rather liked it. He then told me that I was as pigheaded as my father, and I protested that he should not bring my father into the conversation and dare to say that he was pigheaded.

At that moment a woman, apparently in my uncle's service, stopped me from saying anything more. I must say that I was grateful to her, because I am certain she saved me from a thrashing.

She knew my uncle's character and at the strategic moment she rushed into the room and told my uncle that he was urgently needed by some horse-dealers. My uncle grumbled and left the room, and this kind elderly lady, who was apparently to be my governess, took me by the hand and led me to my room. I thanked God for her intervention, and, as she had a kind smiling face, she reminded me of my own mother and I simply could not desist from crying on her bosom, which she lent for that purpose while she stroked my hair.

After I had used up all my tears and all my annoyance with my uncle for bringing me into the wilds, she began to talk to me very seriously, saying that I was a very intelligent boy and I would know what she meant when she said that I ought to be proud to belong to my uncle's family, as it was old and noble. But I still sobbed. Then she told me that she would do everything she could to make me comfortable.

I wanted badly to contradict her, but realized it would be rude when she was doing everything she could to cheer me up, so I sobbed and listened. And that night after a light supper I went to sleep and slept like a log. I was very very tired after the ten-day journey.

The next day I did not see my uncle at all. I had all my meals with Dunia, the governess, and as my aunt was away on holiday in Russia I had a very lonely time to begin with. My uncle kept out of sight for a long time, so that I had no further opportunity to upbraid him, and contented myself by making friends with the peasant boys who played and worked in the yards.

I used to ride with them and see the horse-market in Samarkand, but the most memorable of all my recollections dwells round the lovely and mysterious ruin of Shah i Zinda. This old ruin became the centre of my interest and I built many a dream round it, and played children's games among its crumbling stones. One day I was an emperor hold-

ing court, another day a robber, and another I would be just a little stranger marvelling at its many beauties. I was to see many beautiful buildings, ruins, castles, and houses in years to come, but none made so much impression on me as the Shah i Zinda.

Nature and time have somehow dealt sparingly with the Shah i Zinda. Other monuments and castles of Mohammedan art lie crumbled and broken, but not the Shah i Zinda. Cupolas, minarets, and portals, niches and shrines, are still radiant in their marvellous blues. The open gates are adorned with magnificent carvings, painted with rich colours, and banded with bronze. They looked so perfect that one might have suspected that they had been finished but yesterday. But particularly beautiful was this ruin, which the tooth of time had spared, when the moon was out, casting its white light over the sleeping city of Samarkand, and there near by stood bathed in the same light, tinted with delicate shadows, the Shah i Zinda.

But one thing I did not know about the Shah i Zinda and that was that the well that stood in the middle of the forgotten courtyard was holy; only the mullas and the dervishes were allowed to drink from it.

Now naturally I was curious why the mullas and the dervishes were allowed to drink the water and no-one else. Perhaps it had a very special taste, I said to myself.

So one night after I had been in Samarkand for

about two months, I decided to go on an adventure —to the holy well.

I managed to sneak out through my window around about midnight and as the moon was out I was able to see my way to the ruin clearly. I had in jumping from my window twisted my ankle slightly, but the pain did not seem to matter now that I had already accomplished so much of my journey.

I reached the ruin, and treading very softly I entered the yard. There stood the well. All I had to do was to draw the bucket, which was attached to a string and a wheel, and a taste of the water would be mine. I approached, looking round about me, and began to work the creaking wooden machinery, but barely had I brought the water to the surface when my shoulders were seized from behind and I was shaken like a rabbit.

Fear, horror, and despair filled my heart. I felt as if all the ghosts of the place had me in their grip and as I was taken struggling into the shadow, I could see the blazing, fanatic eyes of my captor. He pressed me savagely to his breast, until I had no wind to cry out, and there were those awful eyes looking at me and piercing me through like embers of live charcoal.

I don't know what would have happened to me had I been unknown to my captor. I expect he would cheerfully have strangled me right there on the spot and given me as a juicy meal to the vultures. As it was, he guessed who I was from my European clothes.

I screamed and shouted my name at him and asked him to let go, but he did not understand my language and I could not follow his. He then gripped me round my wrist and dragged me to my uncle. I was glad at least for that.

When my captor told my uncle his tale, his face wore an expression of stunned horror. I knew what he was saying and I trembled. Apparently I had perpetrated an enormity.

My uncle, who had been roused from his slumbers, was not in a very good mood. He listened carefully to the man's tale and told him to release me. He would punish me, he seemed to say, and the man went away thoroughly satisfied with himself.

My uncle, although he was Christian, was looked upon as a just arbiter between the two religions of Christianity and Islam. He and the Shah of Samarkand had a mutual agreement that neither party should infringe on the other, and this agreement had been scrupulously kept by both parties. But the nephew of the Christian prince comes to Samarkand and within two months is already making a nuisance of himself, so . . .

So I expected that I would get a hiding. But I did not. My uncle did not utter one word. He took me gently but firmly by the hand and led me to the uninhabited right wing of the castle and locked me up in a dark, enormous room. They knew nothing about child psychology in Samarkand.

I went and sat down in a corner and began to

whimper. I thought at first that he had put me into a dungeon with snakes and vipers and I awaited my doom with the resignation of a hero in Hans Andersen, but no vipers came, although the wind howled mournfully through the high, open windows.

I was too terrified to do anything but gaze big-eyed at the darkness, but when dawn came—the first few streaks—I began to see mysterious faces gazing maliciously at me from all four walls. These creatures with fearsome looks and almond-shaped eyes seemed ready to jump from their frames and pierce me with their wicked-looking swords and cutlasses and pikes. Even the armour that hung empty on the walls suggested a horde of murderous Tartars anxious to cut my throat. I was certain that I could see men getting in and out of the armour—preparing themselves for an attack on me—and all because I had tried to taste the water of the holy well. Somehow the punishment seemed inordinately unjust for such a trifling offence.

In the end I was so frightfully scared that I began howling and shouting and kicking frantically at the door. At the end of two hours or so I was released from purgatory and went straight to my uncle's study to apologize. I begged him to forgive me. This he did with rather more grace than I had expected.

Remarkable as it may seem, it was this very escapade of mine which brought my uncle and myself together. It reconciled us. He obviously concluded that I was a lad of spirit, and although he never referred to my misdeed, I think he was rather proud of

the fact. Once he showed me that he had some sympathy and interest in me, I dropped my stubborn behaviour, and after a few days the barrier that had been between us vanished completely and I genuinely began to love my uncle and respect him. This love and attachment persisted for ever after, and was only broken by the catastrophe which befell our country a number of years later.

And in the meantime I grew to love my adopted home....

XXI

FIVE O'CLOCK: MORNING

*

One, two, three, four, five, the strokes of the distant clock sounded, breaking the bewitched silence of my room. And simultaneously, as if those strokes opened the door to another world, the same sounds from a distant steeple reminded me that the hour of prayer was drawing near. It was the Easter Festival in Samarkand. The coloured eggs were being painted, the tall sugar-covered cakes were being made, and the special Easter cake called 'paska' was being stirred before being put in the wooden presses.

No, there was no escaping memory. Events and places clung tenaciously to the brain-fibre and the eyes seemed to hold the dear half-forgotten portraits of other days.

The heavy booming of the Samarkand fortress-clock tore through the frosty silence that lay in the town. The clock had struck a quarter to seven. Slowly and ceremoniously the bronze-ornamented

gates of the Mikloman palace opened. Softly and with a voice something like giggling women, the silver bells of the troika jingled. Prince Mikloman Miklomanovitch, the sole ruler of the Province of Samarkand, which he held in tenure of his liege lord, the Tsar of all the Russias, rode into his courtyard after a tour of inspection. He was punctual, true to habit, and I remember watching him alight from the troika. He looked huge and magnificent in his big fur coat and astrakhan cap. He gave a few orders and disappeared into the house.

More than six years had passed since my first arrival in Samarkand. My uncle had by now won my confidence and trust so completely that I had begun to love this strange gruff man more than I loved my own father. These last years had been the most impressionable of my life and he had lavished every care on me, balancing his largess in wise proportions so as neither to spoil me nor deprive me of anything that I needed for the development of my character.

In the same semi-medieval manner in which he lived he ordered me a professor of history. He might have ordered a crate of Moscow toys or some uniforms, but no, he ordered a professor, a real live old man, who had fallen asleep in the distant ages and who spoke slightly through his nose.

It was this man's duty to instil in me a proper knowledge and respect for history, and with it, of course, an exaggerated sense of reverence and patriotism. The professor's own hobby-horse was Greek his-

tory—but my uncle would have none of that. He wanted good plain Russian history, beginning with the arrival of Rurik the Viking and ending with the Napoleonic wars; no further. Modern history, he said, was a waste of time. The age of heroes was past and in any case it was tainted with the dreadful virus of socialism. Tolstoy was all right for after-dinner reading—but to take the man seriously would mean to turn the world upside down. Not that my uncle wasn't a good and charitable man. He just couldn't understand the meaning of change and improvement. Indeed, why should he? Samarkand, her ancient glory departed, was a meeting-place for caravans and a centre for horse-dealers and thieves; and whole families there were bent over their weaving looms in their white-washed mud and dung houses, making the priceless carpets to strictly guarded family prescriptions. One of red, two of yellow, a green, now a square of mauve, and a thread of white, a white rose, a blue peacock, and now the border. And so on for years and years.

My aunt, a good God-fearing woman, said her prayers often and loved me like a mother. The servants followed me about with dog-like fidelity, and Dunia, my governess, watched tenderly over me. Under such circumstances it cannot be wondered that I was happy.

True, in the beginning, my uncle was not inclined to let me see my brothers and sisters too often. He did not indulge this natural desire beyond allowing

some of them to come down to see me during the summer holidays. Perhaps, after all, this was the wiser course, and although I missed them all terribly my first year, I began to get accustomed to not seeing them and the nostalgia for home died away almost completely by my tenth year.

I might mention that my father and mother never visited me. They realized, perhaps, that I was no longer a son of theirs and they did not wish to remind me of home and all the things I knew so well by coming to see me. Now and again my brothers or sisters who visited me would bring me a special parcel from my parents and would tell me that they often talked about me. But somehow children do not like dwelling on sad things, so we enjoyed our holidays together, and when time came for parting we bade each other a regretful good-bye—but promised to see each other in a year's time.

And so it was that memories of my early childhood died away in Samarkand. The present was too much with me for me really to care, and even the beloved faces of one's parents are soon swept away before the life-demanding forces of the present.

But on a night like this when I could not get to sleep some small regret used to creep into me, and as the hours passed one by one my sadness would deepen and I would struggle fitfully to get to sleep. It was five. I had another hour before getting up, but I decided to banish all my thoughts and get up extra early and go for a ride. I have always found horses

soothing to my nerves. Their long sympathetic faces and soft muzzles, and the exhilarating sensation that their moving muscles make as they traverse the ground, have always proved a great attraction to me.

That evening a small and excited boy stood in the salon, waiting for his uncle to call him in to dinner. Although I was twelve, I still had my meals with the governess and it was on this day that the tradition would be broken. It was an Easter Sunday and I was very anxious to see what a grown-up dinner party looked like; besides, being an Easter, there would be many wonderful and rare foods to sample—foods made only once a year—and also there would be the bristly head of wild boar and 'paska' and the coloured eggs.

On this occasion I was dressed as a resplendent replica of a Cossack officer and I felt very proud at wearing the uniform of the Tsar's guard.

At last the summons came and I entered the magnificent salon reserved for special occasions. I loved this salon. It held memories of great importance and joy for me and it gave me the strange sensation of family pride. I felt a part of the old walls, the ancestral portraits, and the cold steel armour.

How awed I felt before the high, richly carved mahogany table round which stood many (I had never bothered to count the exact number) equally beautifully carved chairs. They were baronial and aloof and the leather on them proclaimed them to be of great age.

Each piece of furniture could tell an exciting tale of the Mikloman family. There was that tall, straight backed chair which stood on the north-side. Everyone called it the Imperial. Why the Imperial? I once asked. Why did it always stand empty and why wasn't I allowed to sit in it just for a bit of fun?

Naturally enough, one afternoon, I made my way into the salon and sat down on the chair and swung my muddy boots to and fro, and naturally enough I was surprised in the act by my uncle himself.

I leapt up and summoned all mycourage and resolution to prepare for a good beating, but my uncle took me by the hand and led me over to the window where at a right angle to the slanting light hung the portrait of a fierce-looking Mongol warrior.

Now since the time I had been locked up in this room as a punishment, I had never bothered to look closely at the portraits. They had given me a two-hours' nightmare on that occasion, and I was not very curious to know what this particular gentleman had done to deserve the special veneration of the whole family.

My uncle then told me to look at the face of my ancestor and remember it. He had offered hospitality to the greatest of Russian Tsars—Peter Romanoff himself—and had aided him during his campaign against the Turks. It was on the selfsame chair that I had so disrespectfully rubbed my seat on that the great monarch had sat and devised his campaign against his enemies. Moreover it was from that chair

that he offered my ancestor the protection of Samarkand and the province thereof.

From that day forth all fear of my ancestors left me and I actually took some pride in them, trying to see whether my face was anything like theirs, and although my relationship with them was only through my mother—my uncle's sister—I was certain that I had a great claim to their respect, and assured those grave silent faces that one day I would do something worthy of them and so deserve a portrait in bright colours to hang next to theirs.

But to return to the Easter Festival. I was expecting the call to the table to come through my old professor, but on this occasion my uncle came himself. He saluted me seriously and I returned the salute. I swaggered into the salon filled with guests, my small Circassian dagger at my side. I now felt a man and capable of mixing with men.

The dinner, it seemed to me, passed in unusual silence for an Easter Festival, and when the coffee was being served in an adjoining room, I was not surprised when my uncle said with very grave mien that he wanted to have a chat with me.

'George,' he said, after clearing his throat with a polite cough, 'I have decided to send you to St. Petersburg. . . .'

I was stunned and pleased at the news. St. Petersburg was the capital city and I had heard a lot about it from my professor. Now what?

'I have decided to send you to the Naval Academy

at Kronstadt, where you will be trained as an officer in the Imperial Navy. I hope you will be happy there and that you will not forget us. Your aunt and I love you dearly and we think . . .'

But I was not listening. The blow had struck. I was leaving Samarkand, not just for a holiday—but perhaps for ever. I was leaving all that I had grown to love. Once more I was setting out on a journey.

'You will understand, of course,' said my uncle, as if he suspected something in my mind, 'that you are a very privileged person. Only the noblest families in Russia can send their sons to be trained as naval officers at St. Petersburg. You will have a fine healthy life and will see the world and meet many interesting people, George. And besides, we . . .'

It was no use telling him that I had met all the nice people I ever wanted to meet and that I wanted to stay in Samarkand. What I did say, however, was more cunning—or at least so I thought.

'But, uncle, there is no sea in Samarkand and I want to stay and fight for you if you are attacked by the Turks—just like the soldier on the wall.'

'My dear boy,' uncle said, 'no-one will attack us here. The Tsar needs good, obedient sailors. And you might become an admiral one day. We shall be proud of you. . . .'

And so it was; I mean that was the way the Tsar's naval officers were picked for him. It was not a matter of aptitude or inclination which decided the

career. No, it was simply an honour, and you had to accept it.

There was no point in arguing about it. I had obeyed before and I would obey again. Perhaps I would make a good admiral after all? Who could tell?

But I took off my small Cossack costume with regret that night and I knew that I had put away my childhood.

XXII

SIX O'CLOCK: MORNING

*

Memories still dominated my tired brain. It is like burrowing amongst old newspapers, old post-cards, old family albums, and looking into trunks forgotten in the attic and full of childhood's books and toys; and now I was going to Kronstadt, to the Naval Academy, to an envied career. I would see England, the Far East, Africa, America. . . . Happy, beautiful dreams!

But before setting out for the Naval Academy, I was privileged—or at least I believe every Russian of my time considered it a privilege—to be present at the third centenary celebrations of the House of Romanoff. My uncle as representative nobleman of Turkistan was invited to take part in the great festivities arranged for the occasion. Incidentally, this was the last great public appearance made by the last Tsar of the Romanoffs.

With me, memory is not always visual; it is sometimes auditory. I can hear to this day the clear silver

chimes made by the small bells of the monastery of Kostroma. For it was there in Kostroma that Russia assembled to do homage before the small peasant hut where lived the first Romanoff who took the crown.

The village of Kostroma was an ordinary and unprepossessing place, and had it not been historically famed, it would have been no different from the many other villages which flourished on the quiet shores of Mother Volga. And now in Kostroma there was a great bustle. Nobles from all over Russia were visiting the place—waiting for the arrival of the Tsar himself, who was going to pay his respects to the shade of his ancestor, Michael Romanoff.

And who was this first Romanoff but a small landowner? One look at the small hut which had survived these three hundred years showed that. Has the revolution turned it into a museum or was it pulled down for fuel by the ignorant? What a tale the ghosts could tell!

On the 21st of February 1613 the boyars, together with the merchants, were assembled by the butcher Minin and were instructed to elect a Tsar. The first dynasty which began with Rurik the Viking was over. It was necessary to found another, and Minin —a butcher by trade, who had saved Nijni Novgorod from the marauding Tartars—led the crusade for a new Tsar.

Their choice fell on Michael Romanoff, a relative of the Patriarch and related distantly to the now defunct dynasty through his mother. So the nobles

and the merchants journeyed to Kostroma and offered Michael Romanoff the crown of Holy Russia.

And he was crowned in the monastery of Ipatiev, a place near Kostroma, and then went on to Moscow to be acclaimed by the populace. History is frequently ironical. The scene of the Romanoff triumph was also to be the scene of their defeat. Three hundred and fifty years after the coronation of the first Romanoff, the last heir of their blood perished at Ipatiev House in Ekaterinburg.

These festivities which I attended were of unsurpassable magnitude. I am certain that the meeting on the Cloth of Gold between Henry the Eighth of England and Francis, the King of France, was insignificant compared to this sumptuously organized fête.

All the things that open a small boy's eyes were there. There were dazzling uniforms, medals, cocked hats; there were the medieval costumes of the *dvoryanes*, the rich landowners, whose doyen Michael Romanoff had been in the village of Kostroma. There were the Imperial Guards, the crack regiment of all Russia. There were prancing dragoons. In fact the whole world which I had known copied in tin in my toys was there.

But besides the pomp and glory, there were simple peasants who had come from all corners of Russia and who knelt as the Tsar and his consort passed them and sought to kiss their hands or their robes. What mystic healing properties they sought, I did

not know, but the Tsar's progress was that of a god and not that of a man.

It was on the second day—or rather night, the weather was bitterly cold and frosty, when I heard the peasants shouting, 'We want our Holy Father, Nicholas the Second' and Nicholas came out of his well-warmed house and bowed respectfully to the crowd and blessed them as a good father should.

Three hundred years ago exactly the same thing had happened, and Michael Romanoff went to Moscow and did his best to be a good and just ruler. He fought sporadic wars with the Tartars, and now and again defeated them. But what he did do was to die rather early and leave the throne to a very nice gentleman by the name of Alexis, who was called the Very Quiet. He is reputed to have said about five words during the whole of his reign, and of those five, two words were used in saying damn when he spilt the salt-cellar. He was fond of swimming, however, and left the government in the hands of his boyars, who naturally made the government a rather good thing—for themselves. One day Alexis went swimming and got out of his depth and was drowned. And that was just about all one could say about Alexis—except, of course, one is rather sorry that he got drowned.

Alexis's son Theodore then came to the throne. He was very musical. He spent the major part of his reign tolling bells, which he did inordinately well. When he grew tired of tolling bells, he used to say his

prayers. So between prayers and tolling he did not have much time to attend to his kingdom, but somehow it just ran on of its own accord and there was a great deal of blood-spilling and graft in high places, but otherwise nothing exceptional to Russian history happened. At last Theodore died and was buried somewhere—but nobody knew where—and all of a sudden the bells stopped tolling.

Then came Peter the Great, who is really very important. His brother was a half-wit, who died after a short reign, and Peter took over the throne. He had some domestic trouble with his elder sister, a lady by the name of Sophia, who would have been a very good ruler—had not Peter been a better one. It was really a shame that two good rulers should come at the same time, but as it happened there was only room for one—and that one was Peter the Great.

He executed a whole regiment of rebellious Streltzi or guards and presented his sister Sophia with the head of the colonel of the regiment in a bottle. After that he sent her into a monastery—or perhaps it was a nunnery—and there she died a very repentant woman. She was probably repenting the fact that she had not got rid of Peter earlier.

The air in Moscow got rather warm for Peter, so he decided to open a window to Europe, and after having trounced Charles of Sweden, he built St. Petersburg on the bones of some hundred thousand peasants who died in the stinking marshes. Besides changing the Russians into European clothes and

cutting off their beards, he was their first empire-builder. He was perhaps a better ruler than Charles the Second of England, but he was just as Merry.

He died after an exhibition of gallantry, and nothing his serving-maid wife could do for him could save him. He was perhaps the most memorable of all the Tsars.

After Peter came another Peter—his second son. The first son of Peter the Great had been killed by his father in a fit of temper. By writing the essay in this way one almost obscures the fact that Peter the Great killed his own son. But that is the way to write history.

Peter the Second died when he was twenty-two. He did not have time to do much damage and was succeeded by Anna Ivanovna, who was over-fond of stable grooms in the same way as Henry the First was fond of lampreys, and died from a surfeit of them. After Anna came her son Ivan the Fourth, who ruled for 494 days and was later repaid for his folly by twenty years' banishment. Then came Elizabeth, who was quite beautiful. She loved dancing so much that she opened the first school of ballet. Unlike Queen Elizabeth of England, she was not a Virgin-Queen.

Peter the Third, who succeeded Elizabeth, was half an imbecile—but he was clever enough to marry Catherine the Great. He did not know how clever he had been until she had Orloff strangle him. She then ruled absolutely and provided an excellent foil for Frederick and Maria Theresa, and some say she was

cleverer than the other two. In any case her armies were better and she defeated Frederick and intimidated Theresa. She also got the largest bit of Poland when that unhappy country was partitioned. She loved Orloff, but Potemkin more. The winter being too cold for kissing out of doors, she built Potemkin a palace and kissed him inside. Otherwise she did a great deal for Russia's prestige, although this cost the Russians pretty dear in lives and wealth. However, those were the spacious days and Catherine should not be included in the Romanoffs strictly speaking. After her came Paul—known as the Mad. He loved intrigue and once exiled a whole regiment to Siberia because the colonel of the regiment had forgotten to salute him. At other times, when he was feeling in good spirits, he would ride through the streets of his capital city and shoot at any of his subjects who were taking the air at their windows. Decorations went to those whose bag was the largest.

Paul died in his bed. He was strangled in bed, and malicious tongues say that his son, the gentlemanly Alexander I, was implicated in the court revolution. Whatever was the case, Alexander succeeded his father. He was a really nice young man, had charming manners and was very fond of Napoleon in the beginning of his reign. He was therefore a man of some discretion and had he stayed Napoleon's friend history might have been very different and Waterloo never fought. As it was he quarrelled with the genius and refused to shut his ports to British ships and

commerce. After Napoleon's defeat, he repented and built Paris a handsome bridge—called Pont d'Alexandre—which everyone who has been to Paris knows. He then tried to be a liberal and rule in a fair fashion but ended up as a despot and insisted on the Divine Right of Kings, and in the end grew tired of the kingship and the factions all around him and one day simply disappeared. Where he went is a matter of speculation. Some say he went into a monastery, but others think he chose Cannes.

After Alexander came Nicholas the First, a burly man with a fiery temper. They called him the Stick. He said General Winter would win him the campaign against Britain, France, Turkey, and Sardinia when they fought in the Crimea. But he died before the victory, and his son came to the throne and concluded peace. Nicholas died from poisoning. It might have been a false mushroom. Alexander, his son, was a very reasonable man. He gave a new charter of freedom and emancipated the serfs, who called him the Liberator in gratitude. In the end he seemed to have repented of his liberalism and was blown up by the Nihilists in March 1881. His son, Alexander the Third, wasn't very popular with the Nihilists, but he escaped them and died instead of a broken spine during a railway accident, when he tried to save his children from harm. His son, Nicholas the Second, was shot down by revolutionaries, and with him and his son Alexis died the Russian Empire. Whether another will come—who can tell? But if the words of

the Tibetan lama who prophesied his fall are to be believed, the Imperial Destiny of Russia died with Nicholas.

I remember my foster-father telling me this prophecy—more as a joke I think than anything else. For who in 1913 could have imagined that the three-hundred-year-old dynasty was to be snuffed out like a candle?

And yet the Romanoffs themselves were great mystics and believers in the occult sciences. Witness the rise of that preposterous charlatan Rasputin—who amongst all his hocus-pocus was able now and again to drop a grain of truth and warning.

Nicholas himself was born on the day of Suffering Job. On his first world cruise—he and his brother George were cadets at the Naval Academy at Kronstadt—he had a friendly squabble with George on the bridge. Nicholas twisted his younger brother's arm and broke the fragile lung arteries. A few years later George, the possible heir to the throne, died. Nicholas was undoubtedly the indirect cause of his death. Ill luck seems to have dogged the unhappy Tsar.

The stands erected for the procession at his coronation had been made of rotten wood. Two hundred people were killed when the stands collapsed, and many thousands were injured. Then a rumour quickly spread that the Nihilists had engineered the disaster and were now firing on the crowd. The crowd panicked and a few more hundred people were

trampled to death. Who was responsible for the rumour? Undoubtedly the police, who were shielding the profiteers in rotten wood.

But more tragic and tactless was the fact that Nicholas did not cancel the court ball that evening. He and his empress went dancing in the Kremlin. It was not the best way to endear oneself to the common people. But Nicholas imagined that he ruled by Divine Right, and not by the love of his subjects. Perhaps he thought the two were analogous.

Four years later the prophecy of the Tibetan monk came true and Nicholas perished, more a victim of bad advisers than of his own heart.

The festivals ended after three weeks. In Russia time was of little account and for three weeks the fiesta raged—that is for the people of wealth and position. I enjoyed myself immensely and made many friends amongst the boys, who were to be my colleagues at the Naval Academy.

Six months later I was sent to the Naval Academy myself and so it happened that for a second time I was torn from my home, and sent for four years to study and to prepare myself for a career I had no heart for.

I remember my secret pious wish as I entered the large gates of the Academy at Kronstadt. I said, God help the Russian Navy if all her officers were press-ganged into her service like that. I hope at least a few of them had some desire to become sailors.

XXIII

SEVEN O'CLOCK: MORNING

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I had been at the Naval Academy for over a year, and by that time I had to admit that, despite my reluctance in the beginning to accept the career, I was slowly but surely getting interested. The first few months I suffered from home-sickness, but the fact that I was lucky enough to win the entrance prize to the Academy did make my attitude change a little. And with the passage of time it changed more and more.

Only the nobility—and the rich nobility at that—could afford to keep their sons at this Academy. The fees were in the region of five hundred pounds a year, besides another two or three hundred for expenses. Translated into Russian money, this represented a goodly sum. The Academy itself was patronized by the young Tsarevitch, the heir to the throne, Alexis. We cadets bore the letter 'A' on our epaulettes in honour of the young man, who used to take the salute at our bi-annual march-past.

The Emperor, in order to do greater honour to the heir-apparent and to fix our personal loyalty to him, instituted a special prize for the best cadet of the year, but instead of giving a presentation sword or a parchment scroll, he exempted this cadet from paying any fees at all for the rest of his course at the Naval Academy. A condition was imposed that this 'best cadet' would have to maintain his standard throughout the entire course, otherwise he would lose the scholarship and the privileges attached.

It was my good fortune to secure this prize and to be introduced to the Tsarevitch. From henceforth I should be looked after by the Tsar's privy purse. This unexpected honour steeled my ambition and I determined to forge myself a naval career of distinction. Besides, my foster-father was in transports of delight. He wrote me a very touching letter, telling me how glad he was to have chosen me as the one to carry on the traditions of the Miklomanovitch family.

Now under such circumstances I felt that I could not let myself down nor the trust of my foster-parents and I worked very hard to retain the scholarship. It was no easy task to maintain an even standard and retain the first position. My pride would have suffered tremendously had I not lived up to expectations. But, as I have already said, this scholarship did more than honour me and pay my fees; it stirred the fires of ambition in me. Now this ambition to be the 'top dog' and to excel in everything that I did had some curious consequences.

As might be imagined, a large part of our curriculum was occupied with sport. It was necessary to build up our bodies for the strenuous life at sea, and so we swung on ladders, climbed ropes, jumped, ran, threw the discus and the javelin, and generally got ourselves healthy with exercise. Now I did all that I had to do in the way of sport and no more. I had an exaggerated sense perhaps of the importance of intelligence over brawn, and as I did well in the classroom, I wasn't very interested in being an athlete.

Once every year a great sports parade was held at the Naval Academy and the most important personages were invited to watch the cadets. The Emperor and his family never missed this occasion, and so it was a very memorable occasion indeed. In later days one was able to say that one did this or the other in front of the Emperor and of course get a great deal of attention. It was still better if you could show a prize won by you and given to you by one of the fair daughters of the 'Little Father'.

'Naturally enough I was very anxious to obtain one of these coveted prizes; I was certain that my foster-father would be still more proud of me. But nothing, absolutely nothing, that I could do would win me the prize. I trained frantically during the last few weeks. I swung about on ladders as never before. I ran, I jumped and vaulted, and hurled about ridiculously heavy pieces of iron, but all to no purpose. I didn't come in last in any of the races—but I did not secure so much as a first, second, or a third.

Happily for me, my foster-father was prevented from coming down to the gymkhana, but as the term was at an end, a footman was sent down to fetch me home.

Now my fertile brain—and my wounded pride—conspired together in an attempt to discover some means by which I could invent some prize to give to myself. I hit upon an idea. A good idea, I thought at the time.

I approached one of the winners of the handsome silver cups and asked him whether he would lend me the cup for a day. I knew that I could not obtain it for any longer period, so I just asked for a day's grace and the boy surrendered it gladly. I told him some fib about wanting to show it off to some friends. Instead, I took the cup to the local silversmith and ordered an exact replica of the original. The good man was astonished, but as I offered to pay double the price, he did not argue. He also engraved on the cup all necessary data—such as name, date, and the event.

On arriving home I presented the cup to my foster father, who was overjoyed at my success and congratulated me. When asked the event in which I gained such a distinguished trophy, I was a little embarrassed, but my brain moved fast. I won it at javelin throwing, I said, feeling that my lack of athletic prowess—well known to the family—could not be quoted in an event like javelin-throwing, which I noticed was little concerned with running or

jumping. Well, the family accepted my victory and my father said that at this rate I was going to be one of the best of the Miklomanovitches. This made me feel even more uncomfortable. I felt like a raven dressed in peacock's feathers. But my ordeal was not over.

A few days later at a large dinner party at which the Shah of Samarkand was present, I was congratulated by the potentate himself, who by this time had quite forgiven my attempt to sip the waters of the holy well of Shah i Zinda. He told me that he would present me with a battle charger on my next birthday in honour of my splendid athletic feat. I thanked him, although I wondered what I would do with a battle charger at a naval academy. My blushes of shame were taken for blushes of modesty—everything I did was interpreted in a generous way. Only my heart told me that I had gone too far. Much too far.

I determined to keep my head, however, and not to mention my athletic prowess more than was strictly necessary. So three weeks rolled by and nothing more was said. Then on another family occasion my prowess was again discussed amongst visiting relatives and my foster-father went so far as to say that he had written to the commandant apologizing for the fact that he was unable to be present at the games, and that the commandant had written replying that he added his congratulations to that of my family for my wonderful javelin throw.

It was then that I knew the game was up. I suf-

fered indescribable torment as congratulation upon congratulation poured upon me. My foster-father all the while watching my turnings and wrigglings with a half-amused air. I cast many an appealing glance at my father but he ignored me with malicious innocence.

That same evening, after the guests had departed, a very forlorn and miserable figure presented itself at Prince Miklomanovitch's study. In my eyes there were two large tears. I confessed my fraud and begged an abject pardon.

My foster-father took the whole affair good-humouredly. He even laughed, which rather surprised and pained me. How could he laugh when I had committed such a sin? He didn't laugh when I tried to taste a little holy water from the holy well—but now he laughed! I really could not understand paternal justice.

But even I could summon up a smile when he showed me the commandant's letter. The commandant said nothing about congratulating me. My father had invented that in order to wring a confession from me. Indeed, the commandant had written expressing how pleased he was with my conduct and my studies, but he regretted that I was not yet up to the standard to gain an athletic prize. He said, however, that I had done my very best and he was quite satisfied. He wished me good luck for my next year's effort in this direction.

But what was far better news was that my foster-

father had not betrayed me to the commandant, that fiery old war-horse Admiral-in-Chief Alexeff; I would never have been able to face him, if he had.

And there my lesson rested. I promised myself that I would never again lay claim to honours that I did not win.

The commandant's good wishes for my next year's performance were doomed to failure. There was no time to think of games and gymkhanas. It was 1914—and in July Russia declared war on the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

As the setting sun disappeared behind the hills at Tsarskoe Selo, it cast a golden sheen over the old church which dominated the valley. Over a crowd of people standing at the portico of the church an aeroplane soared high—like a swan caught in a Chinese print. Drenched by the sun-rays the field outside the church resembled a multi-coloured Persian carpet—there were so many people and so many different uniforms.

At first softly and then with increasing tempo an avalanche of sound arose resembling the reverberations of a distant earthquake. Wild huzzas resounding from the throats of thousands of men, the cry swept along with the power of a tornado, threatening to shatter the entire trembling earth to atoms in one single mighty blow. The Tsar appeared at the entrance of a richly decorated field tent. The glory of Empire hung around him like a mist. In the sunset, like the ovation of a giant, the cannons roared and

there was stillness—a stillness which awoke the soft melodic sounds of a prayer amidst the regiments. The soldiers sank to their knees and began praying to God for the safety of their Ruler.

In the week that followed, old friendships were broken, and strange new enmities arose as armies locked in death's embrace struggled for mastery. The diplomats were frantically applying for their passports, and the Tsar's face was seen to wear a worried expression. At nightfall the Lord's Anointed went into the subterranean crypt of the Feodoroff Cathedral to pray. He earnestly besought the Lord to grant him guidance. . . .

On the 18th of August, as twilight descended upon the palace, the Tsar decided the future of his realm. Like a Nemesis, war—strange and evil—bore down upon him and his country. He was powerless before it. No matter how many times he reiterated that the war was a just war and that he was fighting in a just cause, the spectre of the inevitable calamity was with him. He repeated again the words he himself chose from the Book of Job, the words which had guided his life. He said: 'I was scared by terror, but ever and again it returneth and whatever I fear it assaileth me. . . .'

He was like a man paralysed by the knowledge of his fate from which he had neither the courage to turn nor the strength to flee. He took warning upon warning with a wry smile and all that he could say was: 'What will be, will be.'

XXIV

EIGHT O'CLOCK: MORNING

*

For four years the Russian people suffered all the rigours of war and for four years their destiny was largely in the hands of Rasputin, known to history as the Mad Monk. But there was nothing mad about him. On the contrary, he was sane. Horribly, calculatingly sane.

The war that was fought was beyond the Russian frontiers. No engagement of any kind took place on Russian soil. True, the Germans invaded Poland and had occupied Warsaw, but that was not strictly speaking Russia—and historically speaking, it never will be. But a people does not have to bear the brunt of war itself in order to realize its terror. The wounded men that streamed back from badly equipped base hospitals into the interior testified eloquently as to the nature of the struggle. The increasing price of bread and the increasing wealth of the profiteers; the mismanagement in high places; the inadequacy of supplies to the army; the munition

starvation and the muddle and indecision of the generals, the Tsar himself—all these things belong to the pages of history. But the blood of the Russian people and their suffering is a memorial to human stupidity and wilful carelessness.

And now it was Rasputin who held dominion over the empire of the great White Tsars, and who swaggered about the palace in silk embroidered shirts and who indulged in hysterical lechery and bullied and hypnotized the last of the Romanoffs and his consort.

Who was he—this rough, unkempt man? Where did he come from? He came from the winter-darkness of the steppes, from a lonely settlement in Siberia. A descendant of the men who had fled from the Tsars. Perhaps the descendant of one of the nobles who ran away from Peter the Great rather than submit to the dictate of having his beard shaved. But no, one look at the malevolent, leering face of the Black Saint, a moment's study of his life, of his manners, and the idea that he was the scion of a noble house must be dismissed. Perhaps then, his fathers and their fathers had fled from religious persecution? They were the gentry who believed in crossing themselves with two fingers rather than three; or perhaps they were collective hermits and lived in holes like rabbits and worshipped God from their burrows? No-one knows from what blood he sprang. That is for the curious to find out, and it would mean a long journey, much effort, and no result.

He was born of woman and had a father like the rest of the human species he so despised. He mewled in his bed and cried for his mother's breast. He probably grew up a sullen quiet child, and as a youth began the lucrative career of stealing horses. This occupation necessitated long trips into unknown villages, and it was on one of these trips, as he rode with his herd of filched mares, that he came upon the monastery of the Klysti. It was here among this queer sect that he learned the first elements of his power. The religious madmen, the dervishes of Christianity, showed him the way to glory, and so, unconsciously perhaps, they, the driven and the outcast—the 'True-believers' as they called themselves—were forging in the drink-sodden brain of their new 'brother' the weapon which he, a vulgar and uncouth peasant, would wield in the face of the generals, the bankers, the aristocracy, and the Church. . . .

'Tell me, when did you first feel this great power coming to you?' some hypnotized and erotic female would ask him in a company of people—a prearranged question perhaps. His favourite story would then unroll from his licentious lips.

'I was a child', he would say, 'when it happened. My father and some other villagers were discussing the recent outbreak of horse-stealing and were wondering who could possibly be the culprit. They discussed the problem for a long time. Guards had been posted and every precaution had been taken—but

the horses continued to disappear. The peasants were determined to put a stop to this outrage and vowed that they would hang the man who was doing it. One peasant, a very dignified fellow with a beard and a strong voice, was protesting especially loudly, when I jumped off my perch on the stove and running over to him seized him by the beard and shouted, "Uncle Vania is the horse-thief! Uncle Vania steals the horses!" My father pulled me away from the indignant man and boxed my ears soundly. But I still protested that Uncle Vania was a horse-thief, and a few weeks later my accusation was proved true. I was five at the time. . . .'

He was five at the time! How well he used his intuitive and mystic power when he grew older. But it was the Klysti who really gave him his first grounding.

Grishka—Rasputin's Christian name, if the word Christian doesn't make the saints and the martyrs shake in their sanctified bones—sought shelter with this brotherhood of the Klysti, and one day the superior called him to witness a debauchery. Fifty naked persons of both sexes ran through the gamut of unrestrained vice. Rape, incest, perversion—all the sins were multiplied and then increased ten times and in all these things Grishka took part willingly. A queer religion, he must have thought. But the real purpose of it was to be revealed to him later. After the orgy he, together with the abbot and the brothers numbering about fifty, went and had a bath and

after donning pure white robes went inside the chapel and prayed hard for twenty-four hours.

When at the end of the long period of prayer, Grishka asked for the meaning of the strange ritual, especially the praying part, he was told in all seriousness that the principle of the sect was that you had to sin before you could ask the Lord's forgiveness, and as the mercy of the Lord was a highly desirable thing and it could not be achieved without first giving the Lord an opportunity of forgiving something, they had a debauchery and revelled in all the sins of the flesh, so that being great sinners the greater would the Lord's forgiveness be. This seemed to be sound logic to Griskha, and when he finally left the monastery, he took up the profession of a wandering *staritz* or holy man. He wandered from village to village preaching the remission of sins through great sinning, and organized the 'sin-festivals' himself. Naturally enough his creed was very popular and the superstitious peasants hailed him as the chosen of the Lord. The more he sinned, the more they thought he was the man of God. Especially moving was the spectacle of Rasputin after a glorious orgy, beating his breast with a stone—which he did with great dramatic gesture and effect, without any sort of injury to himself.

Moreover, Rasputin was reputed to have cured many of their ills and diseases. In most cases a careful examination of these 'miracles' will show that he used applied psychology and achieved no more

amazing success than any other doctor who practises this method. His colossal will-power was, of course, a determining factor in many illnesses. He could force patients to believe in him and his cure.

But it was left to a priest to introduce Rasputin and his miracle-working to the clergy and the society of St. Petersburg. Only later, when he discovered —by looking through a key-hole—the exact method which Rasputin used to cure a hysterical woman, did this Ilarion revolt against the 'man of God' and become his life-long enemy; but Ilarion did not denounce him for two years. When he did it was too late.

Finally, in the year 1908, one of the Montenegrin duchesses (twin daughters of Mikita of Montenegro) heard that a friend of hers had had a Pekinese cured by Rasputin, the latest wonder of society. The poor little thing had suffered cruelly from indigestion and thousands of vets had seen the little doggie, my dear, and none of them could do anything for it, when one day Rasputin happened to pass my friend the duchess and her little dog—and lo and behold, the little darling-pet was cured!

The rumour spread like an electrical charge throughout the whole of society. It was too too wonderful. The cure of the Peke led straight to the Winter Palace, where the little Tsarevitch lay ill of haemophilia.

In 1916, in the summer of that year, when the little Tsarevitch took the salute at the Naval Aca-

demy, I saw the unkempt figure of Rasputin looming large like a tarantula spider near the frail presence of the boy. Rasputin wore one of his celebrated silk shirts embroidered by the hands of the Empress. When he took the small hand of the heir I felt a shudder run down my spine. Young as I was I knew who the real ruler of Russia was.

The war had gone on for two years; a weary and disastrous campaign overtook us. The ignorance and inability of some of our leaders drove us to sacrifice millions of lives in Galicia and Prussia. We were tired and needed respite, but what was needed still more was unity, unity in face of the enemy, and, regrettable though it was, Rasputin was the only man who could hold the Empire together. He was above faction and money, and power was already his. He was determined, it seemed, to steer Russia to victory. Some said he was a German spy. That was untrue. He would not have served masters who would have used and discarded him. He served himself first, and because Russia served him—he served Russia.

There were members of the court circles who did not have the same opinion of Rasputin. They decided to do away with him, and Prince Yousupoff was the leader of these men. Curiously enough, I am still—as an historical exercise perhaps more than for any other reason—opposed to the idea that Rasputin's death came too late. I think if it had never come at all he might have saved Russia—and then could have been replaced. As it was, his death shattered

the illusion of autocracy and the Tsar was left alone amidst all the perplexing problems of state, torn by loyalties and his love for his country, his wife, and children. This period of history makes bewildering reading.

Yousupoff made great show of friendship with Rasputin and that cunning, intuitive man was not able to see through the sham. He had all the loftiness of a Caesar now and wondered who could dare to stab at him. Besides, he admired and liked the young men who crowded round him. It made him feel an aristocrat himself.

One night he was invited to the Yousupoff palace and was fed on poisoned cakes. He ate sufficient cyanide to kill fifteen men and did not turn a hair. Then, while he was looking into a mirror, admiring his own hypnotic eyes, Yousupoff drew a revolver and fired five times into the small of Rasputin's back. The monk fell. He had seen Yousupoff's face full of hatred and vengeance in the mirror, but all he could say was a reproachful 'Alyosha—Alyosha . . . my friend. . . .'

The Prince ran upstairs to tell his friends that he had shot Rasputin, and had killed him. But he spoke too soon. The conspirators had barely entered the room when they saw Rasputin rise on his knees with a supreme effort and then stagger on to his feet; they saw him open the door and attempt to escape. They immediately drew their revolvers again and riddled his body. Only after the last of thirty shots was fired

did the colossal body of the Mad Monk jerk and then remain for ever still. They then threw him into the Neva—as if to make doubly sure of his death.

When Nicholas Romanoff, the Tsar, heard of his favourite's fate, he did not utter a word. The murderers were exiled, but the Tsar knew that with the passing of the moujik Rasputin the dreaded prophecy of the seer of Tibet would come true. He meekly awaited his end and barely stirred a finger to save himself and his family. Offered flight, he refused. He was a brave, good, and stupid man.

Russia was holy. Since the days of her first pagan prince, she was holy. She was holy through fire, plague, and pestilence; she called herself holy in answer to the demand of the Golden Horde for ransom and cattle; she fought at Borodino and burnt Moscow because she was holy; she triumphed over Napoleon and even perished because she was holy.

The heads of her double eagle fell. The legend remained.

But the household gods, the demons and the fairies wearied of her holiness and ceased to pity her. The sardonic mercy of the centuries came to a close. Let there be an end to her holiness. And what was there left? The grim, ugly structure of feudalism, serfdom, poverty, ignorance, and naïve speculation upon the 'imponderable Russian soul'.

The steppe and the forest yielded up a dreadful cry. The cry of children deceived, of men mutilated

by blunder and indifference. And with that cry mingled the rantings of weak, frightened despots, the noisy peremptory orders of clerks and of petty officials, the sibilant frou-frou of silk dresses at the Opera Gala, the silver tinkle of champagne glasses, the sound of kisses on white, homage-demanding hands, the clicking of heels to generals who decided with commendable frequency that 'something had to be done', the cracking of sun-seeds in the gallery of the Bolshoi Theatre, the deacon's throaty chant for God's blessing, the tittle-tattle of provincial virgins, the fulsome expression of the food-profiteers on patriotism and determination to fight to the last drop of blood; the liberals asking, 'God to bless them with a Constitution', and the crack of the tipsy droshky driver's whip—what lovely sounds, what melody, what prelude for the full orchestra of war and revolution.

They crossed themselves until their hands dropped off, but the revolution came and holy Russia faded like smoke before the wind. With pathetic assurance the liberals tried to make that wind an ally, but it swept them away too. They rattled their tongues out of their heads trying to explain their mission; they bullied, they allied themselves to reaction and prayed that Russia's holiness would return to her. And the priests and the generals forgot the Tsar, the holy Tsar of All the Russias, and became the godparents of 'Liberty and the Constitution'. The Cossack hid the knout but held on to the revolver. The ballot paper could not be milled for bread. Liberty was a

fiction when men died on distant battlefields for a cause not their own. At last the natural laws, so long upheld, came to Russia's rescue, and the survival of the fittest gave her the blood wherewith to regenerate herself.

But was it Kerensky's provisional government that was going to regenerate holy Russia?

Petrograd (rechristened by this 'patriotic government' from the Germanic St. Petersburg) watched an ironic fate take charge. Kerensky and his confrères spent valuable time in disembowelling cats, chickens, and ducks, like the soothsayers of old, in order to determine their next day's line of action. But rhetorical acrobatics and legal refinements were lost on a war-tired nation, on a deluded soldiery, and a starved and cheated peasantry. While Kerensky spoke about the 'justice of our case' and urged his countrymen to fight the War for the Western Allies, soldiers on the Eastern Front were thinking about the justice of *their* cause, and insurrection against the blundering butchery of the High Command, the inefficiency and effete fatalism of the officers, the bullying ignorance of non-commissioned ranks broke out. Bullets began to seek out the real traitors. The opulent generals staying for weeks on leave, the staff officers gallivanting with harlots, and the food commissariat in the hands of profiteers, whilst the soldier was expected to keep out the shells and machine-gun bullets of the Germans with his body, and attack with a bayonet the concrete trenches, dug-outs, and

artillery. This heroic imbecility was the cruellest joke of history. And the pitiless hand of revolution struck with dreadful severity—a million deaths, a million tortures, a million exiles to save the many other millions. A new consciousness, a new creed, a new value sprang in the hearts of the soldiers. The blind animals of yesterday became arbiters of Europe's destiny. The spies of the Western Powers, the smooth-tongued ambassadors, the 'mercy' missions, the churches, the whole amalgam of organized militarism suddenly began to take an interest in the 'natural demands of the Russian people for a constitution'. The newspapers came out with long stories of Tsarist oppression, lurid pictures of Siberian mines and forests, the beatings in the Ochrana prisons—all justifying the 'liberal' revolution. Eulogies poured in about the 'gallant' Russians fighting with naked bayonets, the criminal assaults on their women and children by the Huns. The Cossacks were suddenly forgotten—or headlined only when they supported the provisional government. Great news. Kerenky, the new Mirabeau, was hoarse with lauding the justice of the cause' and the 'sanctity of law and order'. In the Petrograd theatre they were playing Andreyeff's *Sabine Women*—but Kerensky did not see it. 'Two steps forward to show our determination, one step backwards to show our prudence,' was the motto of his government. It was dead before it was born. It was tolerated because it was dead, and when the gravediggers came the 'corpse' had fled and with it

the 'liberal' constitution. The egg from the democratic hen lay unhatched.

The triumph of the soviets in the October revolution brought the prospect of an armistice to a reality. Russia's enemies were not the Germans. They had fought her for reasons better known to the historians, but those reasons have no part in Russia's own tragedy, the tragedy of great people tied for centuries to the dry-rot of superstition and monarchical anarchy. A country whose history was so vile, so bloody, and so futile; for centuries a country populated by serfs, by men whose bodies were sold while their souls were declared immortal. It was a religion of refined barbarism, where great piety was contrasted with Dionysian excesses, ridiculous aestheticism mixed with a worship of Isis as dreadful and sexually ugly as the Egyptian or the Cretan. A negation of freedom. The convents were living morgues where wives were cast at the despotic pleasure of their lords. A place of Calvary and Sepulchre from which no Christ could ever have arisen—so fast and cemented were the stones around the neck of learning, progress, and art. Artificial and bastard, censured, mocked into perversity—that was the legacy of the 'Little Fathers', the Holy Tsars. The house where madman succeeded madman, where an honest tyrant was murdered by a dishonest, a builder who raised St. Petersburg on a mausoleum of human bones, a Catherine whose soldiers' bodies rotted on every strand but their own, a Paul who was murdered by his own son, an Alex-

ander who, sickened and disgusted with his foolishness, his perfidy to the one bright spirit of revolution, Napoleon, turned his back on his palace and went out into the forest to die thirty years later as a *staritz*, a holy man, a hermit; and Nicholas martyring his men in the Crimea; his son Alexander—the 'Emancipator'—dispensing freedom like a chemist but giving nothing whereby to sustain it. A peasantry chained to the ground, nominally free; paying in cash or kind for that freedom, but unable to move; ignorant, illiterate, diseased. An intelligentsia subservient or exiled to Siberian wastes; the brightest spirits of Russian poverty sent on aimless missions to the unconquered south, to meet their death at the hands of honourmongers and seducers; Pushkin, the poet whose prophetic songs told of the cataclysm to come; Lermontov, slaughtered at thirty-six. An aristocracy fattened, knowledgeable, cultured in Western ways, indulgent, careless, indifferent, religious. The workers starved, beaten, unrepresented, hungry, police-tracked. And this was Russia.

But the true story of a people is in its unwritten history, in the sacrifices of the unnumbered and unknown. The genius of liberty is that it has its home in the heart of the slave and master. And brave men wrote, struggled, and died in Russia for freedom as they have done elsewhere. Her sagas tell of Wat Tylers no less fervent than the English one, of Robin Hoods as capable and simple as their Saxon counterparts. The kindly baron, the upright priest, the self-

less doctor have their brethren over the breadth and space of the earth.

The goodness of human nature is that it saves itself from itself. The moment of struggle came and endless chains of convicts walked to Siberia, young girls were hanged, and a feudal Tsar met his end by a bomb. A crowd collects to present a petition to the Emperor—a swaggering officer orders the militia to fire, and a hundred people are killed—the 'Bloody Sunday' of the first revolution. And the next time that crowd gathered was in 1917; a bigger crowd, more determined and better equipped, led by a party purged and dedicated to the struggle against oppression. It was such an easy victory, is the verdict of history. What else could there have been? Surely there was no other choice? But over those years there is a veil. The birth-cries of a new order are music for none but sadists. The triumph of her saints belongs to the eternal memory of mankind. But the meek took courage then, and the oppressed hope. Its echo found a home in every heart; its inspiration was the hope in the dark years to come. In the future the Russian Revolution may lose its colossal proportions, as a star is lost in the night, but the link of stars across the heavens can never be broken. One day the magic ring will be forged. Sufficient was it to have lived in those times. And that too was Russia.

After the overthrow of Kerensky's government, the revolution crept like a slow river of volcanic lava over the provinces, towns, hamlets of Russia; over-

whelming, destroying. The released forces, young, aspiring, and idealistic, sought to control the torrent. But order is flotsam against the flood of insurrection, and justice has no room in the hearts of people to whom justice has been denied.

Open the prisons, shoot the police, hang the clerks, 'each according to his labour', kill the priests, rob the shops, soil the carpets, spit melon-seeds into the bourgeois faces, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we live. . . . Action, ruthless action against the white guards and their partisans. Comrades—Social-democrats not excepted—Proletarians of the world unite! . . . Famine, ten million starving to death . . : drive out the armies of intervention! . . . God is with us, Russia must be saved from the red Terror. . . . 'Captain, I suspect that young man, have him watched. . . .' Any retreats not authorized by the Central Revolutionary Committee will be investigated and the persons concerned shot. . . . Guns, bread, blood. . . . Is this soviet justice? . . . But I'm in favour of the government. Which government? . . . Your only chance is to marry the English officer. . . . Think about us later when you get to France. . . . And so the wind blew the chaff to other lands. But the poor remained, the land-hungry peasant and the oppressed intellectual, the little school-teacher who taught the peasants the doctrines of Tolstoy, the aged and the sick remained, but the wind blew the chaff to other lands. The pocket general, the procurator, the police-

man, the jailer, the flunkey, the nobleman, and the priest went forth with their hymns, medals, sad eyes, and exquisite manners. By their works shall we know them. They asked for compassion and understanding; they wore an air of martyrdom and resignation; they spoke of their Russia with tear-misty eyes; they remembered her as a pathetic apology for their tears. They spoke with paternal indulgence and understanding for the simple-hearted moujik. He was led astray, they explained. He loved and respected us. We protected him and gave him land on which to grow his bread. We lived on our estates, administering them carefully as trustees to God and the Tsar.

Their women blamed the revolution and its horrors for their temperaments. Their mendacity had a rare charm, their lies were sonorous and appalling in the fatuous atmosphere of the cocktail party.

They fulfilled their destiny as chauffeurs, taxi-drivers, vendeuses, waiters, and bottle-washers admirably well. History gave them an opportunity to justify their 'aristocratism', and many of them failed. The Olympian propensities with which they believed themselves endowed frequently melted into mediocrity—into a bourgeoiserie more despicable than the original, into a vulgar exploitation of their 'titles'.

EPILOGUE

*

A dreadful clanging burst through my head. Drums, fifes and bells vied with blood-curdling yells, filling my ears with sharp pain and making my brain ache. What could it be? What were those bells lolling about in the sky, making an anguished din? Were they the bells of St. Isaac's Cathedral, sounding the death of Rasputin, telling Holy Russia that its enemy-friend-antichrist-saviour was dead? Breathe again, they seemed to say. Breathe again, Russian people. And old Russia took gulps of soft spring air, the girls put on new dresses, the droskies came out in place of the winter sledges, and the policemen put on white shirts. Breathe again, Russia, the fiend is dead; the seducer of the Tsar is in the River Neva, weighed down with iron chains. Breathe again. God has remembered you. The saints have prayed for you. And all Russia breathed in the soft spring air, thinking that its lease of life was to last for ever.

Look how eternal I am, Russia seemed to say. I drowned the Tartars in the steppes; the Poles were defeated before the sacred towers of Nijni Novgorod; the army of Napoleon fertilized our abundant earth; and God himself must have dwelt with us.

Then came voices; voices that called me, affectionate and kindly voices of the people I had nearly forgotten. They were voices of nurses and tutors, distant relations, and dear school friends. The voice of a girl I met at a ball, a small soft voice, shy as the blue dress she wore, and the yellow rose she gave me on parting for the war. And there were endless processions of voices, of priests blessing the fields of the slain, the voice of the captain of the battleship on which I served, the voices of the sailors, mutinous and threatening. These voices mixed with the church choirs singing the everlasting 'Gospodi pomilooi', calling on the blessing of God, the slant-eyed, byzantine God whose nostrils must have been full of the old corruption, and who now no longer looked down with pity from his golden frames, and who took no delight in the scent of the wax candles, and was lonely. God was lonely amidst the death of millions. He had seen all this in other times and was bored. And I had the strange sensation of waking up out of sleep, a sleep I knew to be a sleep, and yet I half-believed the dreams I had seen. They were a little sour and scented with the smell of dead leaves. I sat up and looked at myself, at my hands and feet, still wondering whether I was grown up or whether I

was sleeping in the long white dormitory of the Naval Academy at Kronstadt.

The face of my housekeeper loomed like a pumpkin through my sleep-dazed eyes.

'Please, Mr. Sava, please wake up!'

Her voice sounded ridiculously earnest, as she shook me gingerly by the shoulders. I waved backwards and forwards for a moment, before my brain connected her importunities with something serious.

'What is it?' I asked, stupidly. I felt like asking her a whole set of absurd questions. Perhaps she could answer the crosswords which were forming in my mind.

'Bells,' I said weakly, 'so many bells.'

'Yes,' she said, 'the phone bell has been ringing for the last two minutes, while I was watching over the milk for your coffee.'

'Ah,' I said, 'not the bells of St. Isaac's?'

'What on earth do you mean, sir?'

'Nothing. A vision, that's all. But you're too practical to see visions, I expect.' I was talking purposely, shaking the muddle out of my head.

'But the phone, sir.'

'Ah, the phone.' I lifted the receiver. 'Yes?' I said. 'Hello there, bells of St. Isaac's?' My facetiousness was beginning to irritate me. 'Who is it?'

'What's the matter with you, Sava?' an unfamiliar voice saluted me. 'In a trance?'

'Just coming out of one,' I admitted to the unknown. 'How are you?'

'How am I? Do you think I've rung you up to find that out? This is Hastings.'

Hastings! The obstetrician in the large teaching hospital in the West End. What did he want? Why, he was a friend of mine.

'You, John?' I said. 'Sorry I didn't recognize you. What can I do for you?'

'It's frightfully urgent. . . .'

It always is, I said to myself. Always something urgent. I was in no mood for urgency. I wanted my breakfast and a lazy bath. Besides, I was not on the staff of the hospital, so what was he bothering me about?

'Do you remember, Sava, you sent a woman along to me some days ago, name of Mrs. Mariani?'

'Yes,' I said, 'what about it? The baby arrived yet?'

'It's on the way, but things haven't developed very nicely for the poor little blighter. I'm afraid it has got to be a Caesarean. I can't see how we can deliver Mrs. Mariani normally.'

'Well, go ahead,' I advised. 'I thought there would be something difficult about her. That's why I sent her along to you. You're the best man for the job.'

'Thanks for the compliment, Sava,' said my friend, 'but you try and convince her husband. I've got everything prepared. Operation theatre has been standing by for the last hour, but the husband simply

refuses to permit the operation. Says it's God's will, or something. I've tried to persuade the woman, but she says you promised her that no operation would be necessary. I don't know what to do, so I thought I would ring you and tell you that if we don't persuade her, she and the baby will be dead in an hour. You'd better skip over and try some pretty firm language.'

I had no need for a second invitation. My feet were already groping for the slippers and by a contortionist's trick I had managed to pull my shirt over my head and still go on talking to the obstetrician.

'I'll be over as soon as I pull my trousers on,' I said, putting the receiver down. The poor woman had quite misunderstood me, but there was no time then to argue with myself, so I picked up my coat and struggled into it as I ran down the stairs. My housekeeper stared hopelessly after me. I think she must have thought I had been stung by a bee.

'Back soon,' I yelled, as I switched on the self-starter of my car and jammed my toe on the accelerator and shot forward into a side-street. The traffic seemed to stand still as I charged along Oxford Street, taking to the back streets again as soon as I could. Manœuvring this way and that, and playing cheerful roundelays on my horn, I swept into the courtyard of the hospital like a hurricane and rushed into the maternity ward.

And there he was, that wretched and obstinate husband, moaning away to himself and saying 'Piccola muzzetta! Piccola angeletta!'

I was furious with him.

'Don't signor professore me,' I said to him, as I clamped my hand on his shoulder. 'It's her life, you understand?'

'But, signor professore, you said no operation was necessary. Please, I understand nothing.'

'I will explain everything later, Alberto,' I shouted. 'But sign this paper. We've got half an hour, and then you'll understand everything, everything—I promise you.'

The man sniffed into his moustache, and took the fountain pen I proffered him.

'Now, now, Alberto,' I chided, 'you've no right to be upset. Just think of what your wife is suffering and be brave.'

The man smiled weakly and blew his nose and then, kissing his wife lightly on her brow, watched the operating-trolley take her away. He looked desolate and lonely and kept appealing to me with terrified glances.

'She will be all right,' I said. 'Dr. Hastings is the best man for her. Cheer up.'

Alberto made no effort to cheer up. He sat down on the hard stool and stared into space, while I walked away, after giving Alberto a pat on the back.

I remembered Mrs. Mariani. She had been a patient of mine ever since the operation I had done for her three years ago. The fight for her life had begun then.

She and her husband had appeared in my con-

sulting-room one fine afternoon and declared in their typical Italian manner that the wife had been indisposed for some time. Indigestion is what they suggested.

'My thanks for your diagnosis,' I said politely. Patients like to think that the doctor takes their home-made suggestions seriously. I know quite a number who say, 'I told the doctor *exactly* what the matter was with me.'

I smiled inwardly at the word 'indigestion', but my smile soon turned to a more serious grimace as I came across the real trouble.

'What is it, doctor?' asked her husband, noticing the shadow which had come over my face.

'Oh, nothing, nothing,' I said, wishing to substantiate my fears before I released them into difficult medical terminology.

'The fact is,' I said, beginning to formulate my words as carefully as I could, 'you have something that is commonly known as a fibroma.'

They screwed up their foreheads at my pedantry. I might as well have said that she had something commonly called an abracadabra for all they understood.

They trembled visibly and took me by the hand, saying earnestly, 'What is a fibroma?' If they had asked me whether it could bite, I should not have been surprised.

'The fact is,' I said uncomfortably, 'it's a growth.'

They sighed. That at least was definite, they seemed to say.

'Dangerous?' the husband asked.

'It must be attended to,' I said, avoiding a direct reply.

I examined her again. She was a thin woman and it was not difficult for me to detect a large and movable mass in her stomach. My conclusion was not very optimistic, I must admit. Ninety-five per cent of these growths are malignant, that is, they are recurring, and no amount of cutting away will do any permanent good. It is one of those sad diseases which continue to baffle us and will continue to do so until we find out what causes a malignant growth and a benign one. The benign growths are comparatively simple to operate on, and once removed do not recur. Millions of pounds and dollars go in research to find a cure for this menace; thousands of clues are followed up—but all to no purpose. The best thing, in the circumstances—is an operation. That can at least prolong the life of the patient—a year or two years, perhaps even a little more, but it is something.

That same evening she was already in one of the hospitals to which I am attached, and in three days' time, after the necessary preliminaries, heart and lung tests, she was on the operating table. It did not take me long to confirm my very worst fears. The growth was very large, situated in the lesser curvature of the stomach, that is, in the lower part. The assistant and I exchanged glances.

'Not much to be done, I'm afraid,' I said, 'is there?'

'I suppose you'll close her up?' he suggested.

Yes, that seemed to be the only course open to me. There is nothing sadder than closing up a patient with this disease still inside him—knowing that you are powerless to intervene. Such an intervention would only cause more pain to the patient in a hopeless case. How unpleasant it would be to face the husband and their two children. They were waiting downstairs, confident that after the operation I would go downstairs and shake them by the hand and say that everything was all right and that in a day or two they could see their mother. Alberto could go away full of smiles, promising to tell the whole world what a wonderful surgeon I was! And then what satisfaction there is in doing a really successful operation, watching everything moving like clockwork, admiring one's own skill and saying that the greatest profession on earth is surgery. That's what happened when everything went right, but when things went wrong, when you came across growths beyond your control, then you were humble and said that it was a thankless task to be a surgeon, and you were angry at your powerlessness.

'There's nothing I can do,' I told my assistant. 'But I could show you a new technique. We might be able to prolong the patient's life for a couple of months with this method. Our first step is to take the whole stomach out—there's not much of it that isn't occupied by the growth—then we make an artificial join between the gullet and the small intestine, so

that the food goes directly to the intestines—which will make digestion pretty difficult for her, unless she is fed on very special foods. However, that's our only hope.'

We performed this operation and Mrs. Mariani stood it very well. She was taken back to the ward and careful instructions were left with the house-surgeon, and to our great surprise Mrs. Mariani recovered completely within a few weeks and went home.

But imagine our surprise when we received the report on her internal growth! Ninety-five per cent declare that such a growth is malignant and requires incessant operations—just as many as the patient can bear, but this growth turned out to be quite a friendly one, a benign one, and promised not to recur. This microscopic test proved to us the reason for Mrs. Mariani's stupendous recovery, and by keeping her three months on blood transfusions we were able to defeat any chances of a secondary anaemia —which usually follows any total recession of the stomach.

So it happened quite undeservedly, the whole family and all the cohorts of friends of the Mariani family became my staunch admirers and fanned my fame far and wide over the little streets of Soho. Two years elapsed before I saw Mrs. Mariani again. I was rather surprised to hear her complain of a growth in her tummy again, and I feared the worst. Had the microscopic test gone wrong somewhere? But my

worst fears were dissipated after I had made my examination.

'My dear Mrs. Mariani, this is a growth, I admit, but a perfectly natural one. You are going to be a mother.'

'What, after twelve years?' she said. 'I haven't had any children for twelve years!'

'That's quite possible,' I said. 'The operation probably rejuvenated you.'

'But I'm forty-six,' Mrs. Mariani complained.

Yes, true enough, there was a problem. Could I let her chance another pregnancy? Would she be able to bear the strain? I decided to take another opinion, and after I had had a lengthy conversation with her and her husband and realized how pleased they would be to have another child, I decided to let the pregnancy take its normal course.

I decided, however, to leave nothing to chance, and told her to put herself under the care of my friend, Dr. John Hastings, who agreed to take her into his special maternity hospital for delivery. She had been there for some days before the urgent phone call had awakened me.

A very slow and agonizing quarter of an hour would pass before Dr. Hastings would emerge from the operating theatre. I was certain that success would attend his efforts. He was the best man for the job and had performed many Caesarean operations. That was a great comfort, because I felt very responsible to the husband. I had assured him that no

operation would be necessary, but what I had meant was that there would be no repetition operation for the growth. He had misunderstood me. It is difficult to prophesy whether a woman would not need a Caesarean operation for a delivery. It frequently depended on the shape and the size of the child's head and had nothing to do with the satisfactory externals of a woman's build, although there are many who believe this old-mother's tale explicitly. A woman's build is only an indication, but things are apt to go wrong and disprove the best indication.

So if I sent up my prayers a little more fervently than usual, I hoped the good Lord would forgive me; but when the clock struck nine I saw Doctor Hastings coming towards me. He was still too far to judge the news from his face, but when Mr. Mariani saw him (he was standing even further away from him than I) he burst out into a joyous shout.

'They are well! They are well!' he yelled. Doctor Hastings nodded his head as I shook him by the hand. Mother and child had come through the ordeal successfully.

And with the victory my hunger returned.

'How about breakfast?' I suggested to my friend.

'Breakfast?' he asked. 'Had that hours ago! I've got three more operations to face before I get any lunch.'

So I let Doctor Hastings return to his duties, especially when I remembered that I was going to be late for mine, unless I was quick about my meal.

'What's for breakfast?' I asked mechanically, as I returned to my flat. One would have thought that I did not know.

My housekeeper brought the tray in and the alarm clock.

'You have ten minutes,' she said with the voice of an autocrat, as she poured out the tea. And as I fed myself on toast and honey, I began to wonder what would happen to me this day. What would it be like? Would it be more interesting, more useful, than the preceding twenty-four hours round the clock? And what, I asked myself, was dream and what was reality? Who could tell me what adventures lay before me? In another twenty years perhaps I would be dreaming about this present; but it was no use trying to capture the unformed future. And as I was thinking the seconds were flying past me like mosquitoes, the minutes like butterflies, and the hours like birds, only the years went by with the heavy movement of an angel in flight, traversing the territories of death and disappointment.

But now was the present, there before me, fluttering by. There was my breakfast to eat. There were patients to attend to. For the moment these two things composed my present and made me anxious to be up and about my duties. . . .

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018